

POEMS
1912-1932



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P O E M S

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BY

EDWARD SHANKS

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TO THE MEMORY
OF
JAMES MURRAY ALLISON
AND
THOMAS MICHAEL POPE

PREFACE

It is not easy, as I have now discovered by repeated experiment, to write a preface to one's own Collected Poems without falling into an alarming portentousness or without, at best, seeming to claim for them what their writer has no business to claim. But it is equally hard to let what may be a final collection go out with no word attached to it.

I may perhaps be allowed to explain why, having on a previous occasion used a different method, I have in this volume followed a chronological arrangement. It is because more and more these pieces appear to me in the light of a spasmodic and fragmentary diary. This does not mean that anyone else is intended to or could read in them a connected or even an intelligible narrative. It does mean that not one was written without a definite personal cause, still vivid in memory, and this to me suggests that the order of time will make the most convenient framework. It may be worth while to add that the longer pieces fitted with unexpected accuracy into this arrangement.

I may perhaps be permitted to offer also, since the psychology of literary composition is still so largely

an unexplored field, some remarks on my fear that this may be a final collection. The dates at the head of the different sections tell their own story. In the three years, 1922-1924, there were twenty-five poems; in the eight years, 1925-1932, there were only twenty.

In saying this I neither imply nor invite any judgement on the merit of the poems concerned. But here we have an instance of a faculty, good, bad or indifferent, but valued by its possessor, dwindling without that possessor being able to discover why it should do so. His desire to write verse is no less than it was, his other cares and pre-occupations are the same in gravity, his life perhaps more varied and interesting. But neither desire nor effort of will can any longer draw verse from him.

I am not, be it understood, offering myself as a subject for the psychological laboratory. But this seems to me to be an opportunity for drawing attention to a field for psychologists which they have hitherto relatively neglected. Poetry is produced by an effort of the mind and the nature of that effort is open to examination. The mental process by which it is produced bears at many points a close resemblance to the processes of the dreaming mind, which have recently proved so fruitful in suggestions, even if some of these suggestions remain enigmatic. I am convinced that a following of this clue would not only result in

an addition to our knowledge of the human mind but would also be all to the good of literature. It helps no one, either writer or reader, to suppose that there is something magical or ultimately inexplicable about any poetry, even the highest. Shakespeare and Tupper wrote under the same laws—one with more success than the other.

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The original volumes, most of the contents of which are reprinted here, are: *Songs*, 1915; *Poems*, 1916; *The Queen of China and Other Poems*, 1919; *The Island of Youth and Other Poems*, 1921; *The Shadowgraph and Other Poems*, 1925; *The Beggar's Ride*, 1926. I am indebted to the publishers of the second of these volumes, Messrs. Sidgwick & Jackson, for permission to reprint here a considerable number of the poems which make up my first and second sections, and to Mr. Martin Secker, the publisher of the third volume, for permission to reprint the remainder of the poems in my second section, some of those in the third, and the first three of the longer pieces. Of the poems in the last section, the first two appeared in my *Collected Poems*, 1926. The remainder have not before been printed in book form.

E. S.

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1912-1914

LOVE IN THE OPEN AIR

I'LL love you in the open air,
But stuffy rooms and blazing fires
And mirrors with familiar stare
Cloak and befoul my high desires.

The dearest day that I have known
Was in the fields, when driving rain
Was like a veil around us thrown,
A gray close veil without a stain.

The young oak-tree was stripped and bare,
But naked twigs a shelter made,
Where curious cows came round to stare
And stood astonished and dismayed.

Let it be rain or summer sun,
Smell of wet earth or scent of flowers,
Love, once more give me, give me one
Of these enchanted lover's hours.

ODE ON BEAUTY

INFINITE peace is hanging in the air,
Infinite peace is resting on mine eyes,
That just an hour ago learnt how to bear
Seeing your body's long-dreamt harmonies.
The gray clouds flecked with orange are and gold,
Birds to their rest are falling, falling, falling,
And all the earth goes slowly into night,
Steadily turning from the harshly bright
Sunset. And now the wind is growing cold
And in my heart a hidden voice is calling.

Say, is our sense of beauty mixed with earth
When lip on lip and breast on breast we cling,
When ecstasy brings short bright sobs to birth
And all our pulses, both our bodies sing?
When through the haze that gathers on my sight
I see your eyelids, know the eyes behind
See me and half not see me, when our blood
Goes roaring like a deep tremendous flood,
Calm and terrific in unhasty might,
Is then our inner sight sealed up and blind?

Or could it be that when our blood was colder
And side by side we sat with lips parted
I saw the perfect line of your resting shoulder,
Your mouth, your peaceful throat with fuller-
hearted,

More splendid joy? Ah poignant joys all these!
And rest can stab the heart as well as passion.
Yea, I have known sobs choke my heart to see
Your honey-coloured hair move languorously,
Ruffled, not by my hands, but by the breeze,
And I have prayed the rough air for com-
passion.

Yea, I have knelt to the unpiteous air
And knelt to gods I knew not, to remove
The viewless hands whose sight I could not bear
Out of the wind-blown head of her I love.
Ecstasy enters me and cannot speak,
Seizes my hands and smites my fainting eyes
And sends through all my veins a dim despair
Of ever apprehending all so fair
And I have stood, unnerved and numb and weak,
Watching your breathing bosom fall and rise.

Ah no! This joy is empty, incomplete,
And sullied with a sense of too much longing,
Where thoughts and fancies, sweet and bitter-
sweet,
And old regrets and new-born hopes come
thronging.
Man can see beauty for a moment's space
And live, having seen her with an unfilmed eye,
If all his body and his soul in one
Instant are tuned by passion to unison
And I can image in your kissing face
The eternal meaning of the earth and sky.

SONNET

O DEAREST, if the touch of common things
Can taint our love or wither, let it die.
The freest-hearted lark that soars and sings
Soon after dawn amid a dew-brushed sky
Takes song from love and knows well where love
 lies,
Hid in the grass, the dear domestic nest,
The secret, splendid, common paradise.
The strangest joys are not the loveliest;
Passion far-sought is dead when it is found,
But love that's born of intimate common things
Cries with a voice of splendour, with a sound
That over stranger feeling shakes and rings.
The best of love, the highest ecstasy
Lies in the intimate touch of you and me.

THE CUP

As a hot traveller
Going through stones and sands,
Who sees clear water stir
Amid the weary lands,
Takes in his hollowed hands
The clean and lively water,
That trickles down his throat.
Like laughter, like laughter,

So when you come to me
Across these parchèd places
And all the waste I see
Flowered with your graces,
I take between my hands
Your face like a rare cup,
Where kisses mix with laughter,
And drink and drink them up
Like water, like water.

SONG IN TIME OF WAITING

BECAUSE the days are long for you and me,
I make this song to lighten their slow time,
So that the weary waiting fruitful be
Or blossomed only by my limping rhyme.

The days are very long
And may not shortened be by any chime
Of measured words or any fleeting song.
Yet let us gather blossoms while we wait
And sing brave tunes against the face of fate.

Day after day goes by: the exquisite
Procession of the variable year,
Summer, a sheaf with flowers bound up in it,
And autumn, tender till the frosts appear
And dry the humid skies;
And winter following on, aloof, austere,
Clad in the garments of a frore sunrise;
And spring again. May not too many a spring
Make both our voices tremble as we sing!

The days are empty, empty, and the nights
Are cold and void; there is no single gleam
Across the space unpeopled of delights,
Save only now and then some thin-blood dream,
Some stray of summer weather;
The tedious hours like slow-foot laggarts seem,
When you and I, my love, are not together

And when I hold you in my arms at last
The minutes go like April cloudlets past.

And yet no hidden charm, no desperate spell
Can make these minutes longer, those less long:
No force there is that yearning can impel
Against the callous years which do us wrong.
No words, no whispered rune,
No witchery and no Thessalian song
Can make that far-off, misty day more soon.
The bravest tune, the most courageous rhyme
Fall broken from the bastions of time.

A long and dusty road it is to tread;
Few are the wayside flowers and far apart
And are no sooner plucked than witherèd,
When yearning heart is torn from yearning heart.
A weary road it is,
And yet far off I see clear waters start
And clean sweet grass and tangled traceries
Of whispering leaves, that laugh to see us come,
And there one day . . . one day shall be our home.

The day will come. O dearest, do not doubt:
It is not born as yet, but I shall see
Some day the fearless sunrise flashing out
And know the night will give you up to me.
O heart, my heart, be glad,
Because the time will come at last when we
Shall leave all grief and unlearn all things sad
And know the joy than which none sweeter is
And I shall sing a happier song than this.

SONG FOR AN UNWRITTEN PLAY

THE moon's a drowsy fool to-night,
Wrapped in fleecy clouds and white;
And all the while Endymion
Sleeps on Latmos top alone.

Not a single star is seen:
They are gathered round their queen,
Keeping vigil by her bed,
Patient and unwearied.

Now the poet drops his pen
And moves about like other men:
Tom o' Bedlam now is still
And sleeps beneath the hawthorn'd hill.

Only the Latmian shepherd deems
Something missing from his dreams
And tosses as he sleeps alone.
Alas, alas, Endymion!

THE GRAY LAND

THE dear gray land above the dreaming river
Smiles in my heart still. Would that I were
there

To see the gray-leafed aspen shake and quiver
And hear

The noise of rain the wind makes in the tree,

To tramp the long salt marshes and to see

The tide flood in and fill each bay and creek.

The night comes very slowly, gently there,

And slow, soft winds that play upon my cheek

Call me their brother and I share

The life of all still things that only seek

Some part of light and necessary air

That they may live at least and know no more

Than placid life, unhurried by desire,

The tall bleached thistles growing on the shore,

The short spare grasses parched as if by fire.

There was a man who loved a wood so well,

Each separate tree, each flower, each climbing
weed,

That at the last he thither went to dwell

And mix himself with all those quiet things.

Then gradually left him thought and 'deed

And dead were all his soul's imaginings.

So, day by day,

THE GRAY LAND

All his own being gently flowed away
And left him mixed indeed
With flower and climbing weed,
With them in summer green, in autumn gray.

So the gray country calls me till I go
And make surrender of myself again;
The misty hill, the leaden stream below
Are waiting to receive me when I will.
And if my stubborn heart and hands complain
A slow wind moves upon the misty hill
And whispers to me here of peace and rest,
Of union with stone and grass and tree,
Where being sleeps and is not curst or blest,
Where hands can never feel and eyes not see,
Where life and death alike are gray,
In this gray land that sucks my life away.

THE GOLDEN MOMENT

ALONG the branches of the laden tree

The ripe fruit smiling hang. The afternoon
Is emptied of all things done and things to be.

Low in the sky the inconspicuous moon
Stares enviously upon the mellow earth,
That mocks her barren girth.

Ripe blackberries and long green trailing grass
Are motionless beneath the heavy light:

The happy birds and creeping things that pass
Go fitfully and stir as if in fright,

That they have broken on some mystery
In bramble or in tree.

This is no hour for beings that are maiden;

The spring is virgin, lightly afraid and cold,
But now the whole round earth is ripe and laden

And stirs beneath her coverlet of gold
And in her agony a moment calls . . .

A heavy apple falls.

NOW WOULD I BE

Now would I be in that removed place
Where the dim sunlight hardly comes at all
And branches of the young trees interlace
And long swathes of the brambles twine and fall;
A space between the hedgerow and a road
Not trod by foot of any known to me,
Where now and then a cart with scented load
Goes sleepy down the lane with creaking axle-tree.

And there I'd lie upon the tumbled leaves,
Watching a yard of the all else hidden sky,
And make such songs a drowsy mind believes
To be most perfect music. So would I
Keep my face heavenwards and bless eternity,
Wherein my heart could be as glad as this
And lazily I'd bid all men come hither
And in my dreams I'd tell them what they miss,
Living in hate and work and all foul weather.

And still my happy dreams would go,
Like children in a cowslip field
Chasing rich-wingèd insects to and fro
To see what rare delights they yield. . . .

. . . O I am tired of working to be cheated
And sick of barriers that will not fall,

Of ancient prudent words too much repeated,
And worn-out dreams that come not true at all.
I know too well what things they are that ail me;
 To fight is nothing, but to see
Thus at the last my own hand fail me
 Is agony.

O for that corner by the hummocked marshes,
Visited hardly by the cynic sun,
Where nothing clear and nothing bright or harsh
 is,
Where labour and the ache of it are done,
Where naught is ended and where naught begun!

THE VISION IN THE WOOD

THE husht September afternoon was sweet
With rich and peaceful light. I could not hear
On either side the sound of moving feet
Although the hidden road was very near.
The laden wood had powdered sun in it,
Slipped through the leaves, a quiet messenger
To tell me of the golden world outside
Where fields of stubble stretched through counties
wide.

And yet I did not move. My head reposed
Upon a tuft of dry and scented grass
And, with half-seeing eyes, through eyelids closed,
I watched the languid chain of shadows pass,
Light as the slowly moving shade imposed
By summer clouds upon a sea of glass,
And strove to banish or to make more clear
The elusive and persistent dream of her.

And then I saw her, very dim at first,
Peering for nuts amid the twisted boughs,
Thought her some warm-haired dryad, lately burst
Out of the chambers of her leafy house,
Seeking for nuts for food and for her thirst
Such water as the woodland stream allows,
After the greedy summer has drunk up
All but a drain within the mossy cup.

THE VISION IN THE WOOD 17

Then I, beholding her, was still a space
And marked each posture as she moved or stood,
Watching the sunlight on her hair and face.

Thus with calm folded hands and quiet blood
I gazed until her counterfeited grace

Faded and left me lonely in the wood,
Glad that the gods had given so much as this,
To see her, if I might not have her kiss.

THE VISION IN THE WOOD

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With rich and peaceful light. I could not hear
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ELEGIACS

I

Roses and kisses alike we've known and enjoyed
to the fullest:

Yesterday's roses are dead, those of next year
are not born.

Autumn comes on apace. O take my head on your
bosom,

Let us reason awhile between a kiss and a
kiss.

All my body and soul are bent and bowed to your
service;

Take my body and soul, give me your body and
soul,

Trusty and anxious servants, bound the one to the
other,

Seek not to set them apart, each has station in
love.

Love me and understand me, sympathy give me
and passion,

Give me a place in your mind, give me a place
in your heart.

Long life lies before us, years of living together;
Reason is not enough; kiss me, beloved, again.

II

Gorse and the curving grass and the sun-heavy air
were around us:

All the world was asleep: you and I were awake.
Slowly the children crept to rest in the shadowy
bushes,

Slowly still the sun rose in the vacuous sky.
Earth and air and our souls were faint in the heat
of the noon-day;

Slower and yet more slow moved your hand in
my hair.

Time stood still and the sun had checked his path
in the azure;

Not a breath in the air ruffled the leaves of the
bush.

Even our hearts were still and the restless swarm
of our kisses

Paused and abandoned their flight, resting yet
on our lips.

Still, as a man in a swoon sees heaven and earth
laid before him,

Clearly I saw our love, binding and making us
one.

A RHYMELESS SONG

RHYME with its jingle still betrays
The song that's meant for one alone.
Dearest, I dedicate to you
A little song without a rhyme.

The most unpractised schoolboy knows
That quiet kisses are the sweetest.
Safe locked within my arms you lie,
Let not a single sound betray us.

Suppose your jealous mother came
By chance this way and found us here . . .
Be still, be still, and not a sound
Shall give her warning that we love.

WALKING AT NIGHT

To A. G.

THE moon poured down on tree and field,
The leaf was silvered on the hedge,
The sleeping kine were half revealed,
Half shadowed at the pasture's edge.

By steep inclines and long descents,
Amid the inattentive trees,
You spoke of the four elements,
The four eternal mysteries.

SONG

SINCE love is mortal as man,
Give good heed to your love,
Lest a year be the length of its span
Or a day or an hour be enough.

Watch it, for is it not fair?
Shield it, for is it not flame?
Look to it, so that it wear
Ever and always the same.

Love dying is dead for good,
Kisses cannot revive it.
Look to it lest you should
See love die and survive it.

SONG

Who thinks that he possesses
His mistress with his kisses
 Knows neither love nor her.
Nor beauty is not his
Who seeks it in a kiss:
If you would seek for this
 O seek it elsewhere!

Love is a flame, a spirit¹
Beyond all earthly merit
 And all we dream of here;
Strive as you may but still
Love is intangible,
No servant to your will
 But sovereign elsewhere.

THE MORNING SUN

PERHAPS you sleep now, fifty miles to the south,
While I sit here and dream of you by night.
The thick soft blankets drawn about your mouth
Have made for you a nest of warm delight;
Your short crisp hair is thrown abroad and spilled
Upon the pillow's whiteness and your eyes
Are quiet and the round soft lids are filled
With sleep.

But I shall watch until sunrise
Creeps into chilly clouds and heavy air,
Across the lands where you sleep and I wake,
And I shall know the sun has seen you there,
Unmoving though the winter morning break.
Next, you will lift your hands and rub your eyes
And turn to sleep again but wake and start
And feel, half dreaming, with a dear surprise,
My hand in the sunbeam touching at your heart.

PERSUASION

STILL must your hands withhold your loveliness?
Is your soul jealous of your body still?
The fair white limbs beneath the clouding dress
Are such hard forms as you alone could fill
With life and sweetness. Such a harmony
Is yours as music and the thought expressed
By the musician: have no rivalry
Between your soul and the shape in which it's drest.
Kisses or words, both sensual, which shall be
The burning symbol of the love we bear?
My art is words, yours song, but still must we
Be mute and songless, seeing how love is fair.
Both our known arts being useless, we must turn
To love himself, and his old practice learn.

LOVE'S CLOSE

Now spring comes round again
With blossom on the tree
Dark blossom of the peach,
Light blossom of the pear,
And love-lorn birds complain
And nesting birds prepare
And love's keen fingers reach
After the heart of me.

But now the blackthorn blows
About the dusty lane
And new buds peep and peer,
I have no joy at all,
For love draws near its close
And love's white blossoms fall
And in the springing year
Love's fingers bring me pain.

THE WEED

My mother told me this for true
That there behind the mountains,
That wear the mists about their feet
And clouds about their summits,
There grows the weed Forgetfulness,
It grows there in the gullies.

If I but knew the way thereto,
Three days long would I wander
And pick a handful of the weed
And drink it steeped in honey,
That so I might forget your mouth
A thousand times that kissed me.

BALLAD

O BOY with thick and flowing hair,
Why are your eyes so sad,
Since spring is reigning in gardens and fields
And all the birds are glad?
O, go where the dear maidens are,
Picking daisies, star on star,
And leave your idle sorrow.

—No maiden's love can stay my grief,
No kisses heal my wound,
Because my life is a young plant
With woodbine tendrils bound.
A young girl's hands have hold of me
And since she loves me tenderly
My sorrow is not idle.

—Why, many a boy would give his hand
To have such grief as this.
How are you hurt by being loved
Or wounded by a kiss?
Now seek your love and carry her
Where the long river grasses stir
And hug and kiss in secret.

—Because her love is more than mine
I can no more endure

Her lips upon my lips, her joy
In a meeting-place secure.
Flowers bloom, birds sing and she is glad
But I am sorry, sick and sad,
O, I am sick of loving.

—Then come with me, for I can give
Love that is light and fleeting:
I'll laugh in your embrace and crave
No second time of meeting.
My love's a breath, a song, a flower
That lives and dies within the hour
And does no hurt in dying.

THE COMFORTABLE LOVER

SIGHS and love-glances
Under dark trees,
Witnessed by squirrels
And sung by the breeze.

This be their bridal:
Cuckoo for priest,
Thrushes for choristers,
Nuts for the feast.

Green, green the grass grows:
My bed is white.
Farewell, foolish lovers,
I give you good-night.

THE SEARCH

SINCE May is come, I go to seek
My love by lane and road and street.
There she is, there, ah, no, not she,
Another clothed delusively.
You people in the narrow roads,
You know not how the May month goads
Me to my love and our delight
In brambled thickets out of sight.
Stay not the youth who hurries by
With wind-blown hair and anxious eye,
For May is come and gone too fast:
A fortnight even now is past.
More precious moments must I spend,
Searching the town from end to end?
Scatter, make way, for I can see
Her at a distance beckoning me.

ENQUIRY

O THOU my belovèd,
How art thou so fair
From the rounded ankle
To the crown of bright hair?
O, how hast thou bound me
Who fain would be free?
What spells hast invented
For capturing me?

The boughs on the river
Hang drooping and low:
We watch their green shadows
Lie drowning below.
O, fold round us, branches,
From curious eyes,
You leaves of the elder,
A curtain devise.

Come round us so closely
That no man may see
In the shallow green channel
My loved one and me:
Then I will discover
How she is so fair
From the rounded ankle
To the crown of bright hair.

THE GREAT CHILD

I HEARD a young girl singing
Under the summer sun:
For burning love of a young man
Her heart was all foredone.
"This is my child and lover,
My lover when he's strong,
But when he's spent with loving
My child the whole day long.

"I nurse him on my bosom,
So dear a weight he is,
And soothe his weary eyelids
With a half-perceivèd kiss."
And I saw in them together,
Amid the grasses wild,
The maiden with her lover,
The mother with her child.

APOLOGY

HAVE I slept and failed to hear you calling?
Cry again, belov'd; for sleep is heavy,
Curtaining away the golden sunlight,
Shutting out the blue sky and the breezes,
Sealing up my ears to all you tell me.
Cry again; your voice shall pierce the clumsy
Leaden folds that sleep has wrapt about me.
Cry again! accomplish what the singing,
Hours old now on all the trees and bushes,
And the wind and sun could not accomplish.
Lo! I waste good hours of love and kisses
While the sun and you have spilt your glory
Freely on me lying unregarding.
In the happy islands, where no sunset
Stains the waters with a morbid splendour,
Where the open skies are blue for ever,
I might stay for years and years unsleeping,
Living for divinest conversation,
Music, colour, scent and sense unceasing,
Entering by eye and ear and nostril.
Ah, but flesh is flesh and I am mortal!
Cry again and do not leave me sleeping.

HALF HOPE

AUGUST is gone and now this is September,
Softer the sun in a cloudier sky;
Yellow the leaves grow and apples grow golden,
Blackberries ripen and hedges undress.
Watch and you'll see the departure of summer,
Here is the end, this the last month of all:
Pause and look back and remember its promise,
All that looked open and easy in May.

Nothing will stay them, the seasons go onward,
Lightly the bright months fly out of my hand,
Softly the leading note calls a new octave;
Autumn is coming and what have I done?
Even as summer my young days go over,
No day to pause on and nowhere to rest:
Slowly they go but implacably onwards,
Ah! and my dreams, alas, still they are dreams.

How shall I force all my flowers to fruition,
Use up the season of ripening sun?
Softly the years go but going have vanished,
Soon I shall find myself empty and old.
Yet I feel in myself bright buds and blossoms,
Promise of mellowest bearing to be.
Still I have time beside what I have wasted:
Life shall be good to me, work shall be sweet.

A NIGHT PIECE

Now the gold-finch is sleeping in the oak-tree,
Now at last the cuckoo falls to silence;
In the thicket the nightingale is silent,
Conning his love-song.

Only one bird slips across the darkness,
Watch his long wings meet above in flying.
Listen! . . . listen! . . . a whisper in the orchard . . .
It is the night-jar.

Day has gone but the night has yet no jewels;
Stillness, darkness weigh on us unwilling.
See there, westwards, lo! a shining planet
Hangs, unattended.

RECOLLECTION

HAWTHORN above, as pale as frost,
Against the paling sky is lost:
On the pool's dark sheet below,
The candid water-daisies glow.

As I came up and saw from far
The water littered, star on star,
I thought the may had left its hedge
To float upon the pool's dark edge.

COUNTRY GIRL'S COMPLAINT

WHEN hawthorn-trees were first in flower
And great white clouds did pass,
Upon a day, upon an hour,
Upon a happy day
My lover came this way
And said, Come out and lie in grass,
Come out and lie in grass.
And so we lay and so we lay
Long happy hours of burning day
And kissed and were content,
And still we could not go away
Till all the light was spent.
What happy hours we then did pass,
Deep in the first long April grass!
Ah, welladay!
My love is gone away.
And he has found another love,
An upland village treasure-trove,
And I must keep without an end
The treasure that I cannot spend,
That was for him alone.
My life is done.

SLEEPING HEROES

OLD Barbarossa
Sleeps not alone
With his beard flowing over
The gray mossy stone.

Arthur is with him
And Charlemain. The three
Wait for awaking,
Wait to be free.

When the raven calls them
They'll rise all together
And gird their three swords on
And look at the weather.

Arthur will swear it is
A very cold morning:
Charlemain says a red sunrise
Is the shepherd's warning.

Barbarossa says nothing
But feels in every bone
A pang of rheumatism
From sleeping on wet stone.

SLEEPING HEROES

Then from the gray heaven
Comes a mist of faint rain
And the three sleeping heroes
Turn to sleep again.

"HIGH GERMANY"

No more the English girls may go
To follow with the drum,
But still they flock together
To see the soldiers come;
For horse and foot are marching by
And the bold artillery:
They're going to the cruel wars
In Low Germany.

They're marching down by lane and town
And they are hot and dry,
But as they marched together
I heard the soldiers cry:
"O all of us, both horse and foot
And the proud artillery,
We're going to the merry wars
In Low Germany."

August, 1914.

DRILLING IN RUSSELL SQUARE

THE withered leaves that drift in Russell Square
Will turn to dust and mud and moulder there
And we shall moulder in the plains of France
Before these leaves have ceased from their last dance.

The hot sun triumphs through the fading trees,
The fading houses keep away the breeze
And the autumnal warmth strange dreams doth breed
As right and left the faltering columns lead.

Squad, 'shun! Form fours. . . . And once the France
we knew

Was a warm distant place with sun shot through,
A happy land of gracious palaces,
And Paris! Paris! where twice green the trees
Do twice salute the all delightful year!

(Though the sun lives, the trees are dying here.)

And Germany we thought a singing place,
Where in the hamlets dwelt a simple race,
Where th'untaught villager would still compose
Delicious things upon a girl or rose.

Well, I suppose all I shall see of France
Will be most clouded by an Uhlan's lance,
Red fields from cover glimpsed be all I see
Of innocent, singing, peasant Germany.

Form four-ers! Form two deep! We wheel and pair
And still the brown leaves drift in Russell Square.

THE QUEEN OF CHINA: A POEM

*"How we spun
A shroud of talk to hide us from the sun
Of this familiar life."*

To Naomi Royde-Smith

CHARACTERS

The KING

The PRINCE

The GENERAL

The CHAMBERLAIN

TWO ITALIAN TRAVELLERS

An OLD SCHOLAR

Three DOCTORS

A YOUNG COURTIER

TWO SENTRYES

The PRINCE'S SERVANT

The QUEEN

TWO SLAVE GIRLS

A GIRL'S VOICE

Place.—Various parts of the Royal Palace of China.

Time.—In the Fourteenth Century of the Christian Era.

FIRST ACT

Courtyard of the Royal Palace in the capital of China.

Enter the KING and the GENERAL.

GENERAL: You are in haste, my lord?

KING: I still must haste

To catch the light before it flies from me,
And now the council gathers. You are called:
Will you not come?

GENERAL: I have despatches. Well?

KING:

To read in council?

GENERAL: Ours alone at first,
Not to be judged on hastily or thrown
Unthought on to the common ear, so grave,
And yet so full of hope. . . . Of hope? Speak on;

KING:

I listen.

GENERAL: These are from the Tartar border
Where now the wretched villages in flame
Prophecy woe to come with smoky tongues.

The foe is out,
His army widely set and ravaging
Our lands unshielded. Up and down the marches
Our scanty soldiers move in desperate packs
And hold their line with peril.

And the army?

KING:

Are all our troops afoot?

GENERAL:

An hour ago

I set our messengers on every road.
The governors are stirring to the work,
My missives dropping in the waiting camps
Inflame their hearts already. Have no fear
Nor doubt success. We'll push them back again
Until their host in ruin overtopples
Like a young foolish horse that rears and falls,
Crushing his rider under him. We'll have them
down.

KING: Why, this is well.

GENERAL:

And yet not well enough.

For now we may with just excuse and much
Indulgence of our purpose scald the sore
That festers in our side. I'd raise an army,
More than the border hath these twenty years
Trembled beneath the tread of. Then their land
Shall lie unfended from our blow and crouch
And offer tribute as a recompense
And be a province.

KING:

These are weary schemes

And bloody projects and we two are old.
Speak you to younger soldiers—to my son.

GENERAL: Your son. . . .

KING:

You speak with such a heavy tongue

The two reluctant syllables, your mouth

Trembles, your eyes avoid my eyes—

GENERAL:

Your son. . . .

KING: My son's not whole, my son is heavy and
sick.

I have observed him and you observing him;
Often the same thoughts lay in our two brains,

By silence and by shame dissevered. Gladly
I'd give an army to him for the toy
That princely youth delights in.

GENERAL: O dear Lord!

Will you not take the battle for an ease
Of all your care in watching over him?

KING: I am too old

And age hath sucked my plenitude of desire;
The vessels are dried up,
Wherein the hot and maddening lymph resided
That urges men to conquest. This will be
A mighty war for glory and renown—
You speak an ancient tongue, a dialect
My lips have lost the use of. I have known
Glory, the toy that young men die to purchase,
But I've no relish in it, being old.
If my son's blood were young as are his years. . . .

GENERAL: Wise huntsmen sometimes take an
ailing hound

Out to the coursing-places that he knew
And let him scent the quarry for a cure.

KING: Well like a huntsman spoken!

GENERAL: He that knows

Nature of dog and horse is wise enough
To govern continents.

KING: Is this not he,
That slowly walks along the avenue?
I'll try your skill in venery. Here he comes.

The PRINCE enters

PRINCE: I wish you happiness, dear father.

And I

KING:
Wish you more spirit and a cheerful look

To front the morning with.

GENERAL: Good prince, brave youth,
Are you a youth indeed or older than we
To be so listless?

PRINCE: I am sad, I own,
And look not brightly out nor think not bravely.

KING: What ails you then?

PRINCE: Why, sir, I cannot tell
What strange infection spreads along my veins
And drowns in my heart. O, let me rest,
For my disease hath touched the will of youth
To be at work and, were my labour done
In sixty heavy years, I could not be
More weary or more out of love with life
And lifeless in my love.

KING: Whom have you loved?

PRINCE: Only the world and what therein doth
stand

I counted formerly, as lovers count
Their mistresses' most delicate delights,
But earth no longer pleases my dull eyes.
It is my blood, dear father, old too soon,
That duly not performs its proper task
To feed the passions.

GENERAL: When you carried arms
And sat your horse and led your troop, you looked
not

So faintly mooded. You were strong of hand
And sometimes I could see your parted lips
Whisper a silent song to company you
In time with the horse's gallop. We have ridden,
Where the dim morning struggled with the mist
On the wide plain, before the ranked army,

Galloping side by side and marshalling
 The fiery soldiers. Ride again with me,
 For there's adventure yet and troops to lead
 And smoke and dust to breathe where men
 contend.

PRINCE: I have forgotten all you speak of now.

KING: If arms could win my son from his
 disease,

I'd make a war for medicine and reckon
 The ravaged border but a blister set
 To draw the kingdom's humours.

PRINCE:

Dear my lord,

King revered, father loved, and both obeyed
 With all humility and all affection,
 If I am slow in taking up the word
 That now you cast to me, I have no fear.
 I would not set one penny on my life
 Nor take a step aside from waiting death:
 But I am spiritless and ill at ease
 And would not wear my mail or sit my horse.
 I am sick, I am sick and will not touch the lance
 Nor lift the sword nor set my foot in stirrup
 But still with drooping head and unlit face
 Go pacing on my ways about the court
 And let the months run by uncounted still.

GENERAL: May the gods give you a more morn-
 ing mood

And something better rising in your heart.
 You were not so.

KING:

Nor I, when I was young.

GENERAL: No, by the gods! You were a hasty lad,
 Save when a lady flouted you. Shame upon you,
 Dear prince, to languish so without a cause!

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No wound, no ailment nor no hurt of love
 Can you advance in reason. You confess
 That you have borne a thin and general love
 To all creation and dispersed your heart
 Unthriftilly on the world and thus you are sick
 Of mere philosophy. Man, love your horse
 And tend your arms and cherish one beside,
 A lady, any lady, and be glad
 A soldier wants so little to be glad.

PRINCE: I am no soldier, I!
 I find no sweetness in the emulation
 Of giving death or braving it.
 Count me an emptied man, a youthful dotard,
 Who totters down his early years and fades
 Out of the bright-aired places that he knew,
 Too dull to be regretful. So's my humour,
 Still to be sad, still to be unaroused,
 And let my passions rest or rot in peace.

GENERAL: But hear what's now on foot. A
 moment yet!
 You have not understood.

KING: We cannot move him.
 I dreamt—we both were foolish. Let it pass
 And let the years have sway. In his right season,
 Fair unadornèd youth will scare these mists
 And show himself with burning face arisen.
 Over the astonished country ere we die.
 I'll leave unstirred the waters of my grief:
 These arguments are like the wands wherewith
 Boys puddle in a stagnant pool and raise
 Bubbles of nauseous air, from slime corrupted,
 That chokes the heart with sickness. Did I linger
 Too much on this or find it past all hope,

THE QUEEN OF CHINA

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The happiness that fills my flowing days
Were poisoned at the root. O, plead no more!

Enter the CHAMBERLAIN

CHAMBERLAIN: Great king, the dragon-throne
is set

And ringed with all your guards in golden mail.
The reverend mandarins are crowding in
And lose their several wisdoms in the crowd
With pushings, stampings and revilings. Now
The Queen is on her way.

KING: Come, my old friend;
My son, your place, though dumb, is at my side.

PRINCE: My place in council suits well with my
mind,

For there the young are licensed to be dumb.

KING: Let us go in, old fellow. Youth refuses
The high adventure we have offered it.
There are no wars now, swords are out of fashion.

*They go in. Two SENTRIES take up their posts
at the gate*

FIRST SENTRY: There are wars going. Did you
hear their talk?

SECOND SENTRY: Hear less, say nothing. We are
here on guard

Our eyes must be upon the gate, our tongues
Behind our teeth.

FIRST SENTRY: Watch you yourself, my friend.
Who are these in the gate?

SECOND SENTRY: Stand where you are;
Strangers. No further step, until we know
What men you be. This is the inner courtyard.

The two TRAVELLERS enter

FIRST TRAVELLER: We are known, good soldier,
we are customed here:
Let us but one step farther in to find
Good friends and many.

SECOND SENTRY: We are not your friends,
Nor have I ever seen a man like you
With beard so thick, and baked brown face so
long
And such round staring eyes.

FIRST TRAVELLER: We are foreigners
And yet not enemies.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Stand back, young fool,
Whom half a month of half-learnt drill hath taught
To tyrannise and threaten with the pike,
That trembles in your clumsy fingers.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Still!
Enough of quarrelling words. Good soldier, go
And fetch the ancient Chamberlain, whom we
knew.

His warrant will suffice to stamp us friendly
And worthy of admission.

SECOND SENTRY: See that they do not pass you. I
will go.

He goes out

FIRST SENTRY: I hardly know if you be men
indeed,
But I am not afraid . . . I wear a charm.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Your pike will do you better
service. We
Are men, not devils.

FIRST TRAVELLER: See, the Chamberlain

Approaches, almost hasting!

The CHAMBERLAIN enters

Do you know us?

Do our countenances in your memory hold
Or hath not amity such preserving stuff
To keep our pictures constant in your eyes?

CHAMBERLAIN: I know you not. . . . I know you!

Is it true?

You are here again, old friends?

FIRST TRAVELLER: After long leagues

On camel-back across the bitter sands
That are more salt than is the merciless sea
And not so beautiful.

CHAMBERLAIN: But you are here,
New washed and cleanly clothed, with happy faces,
Among your ancient though your alien friends.

SECOND TRAVELLER: We have come to you again,

I know not why,
For surely there is joy in Lombardy;
The clear white wine is made there and the women
Are also clear and white, and straight and tall,
And the grey olives grow upon the hills
In sunshine no less generous than this.
But we have ridden on horses, mules and camels
And crossed wide seas in many dangerous ships
To be with you again.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Is there no news?
Or is the kingdom still as when we left it,
Placid and sleepy and daily growing fat
On the rich harvest of the river-mud?
Have not the Tartars once come down like hail
To rumple the silk skirts of your fair women

And slay your wise men in their libraries?

CHAMBERLAIN: You have gone and come again
as to your home

After a day of absence. Still the river
Leaves its deposit on the layered shore
And there the corn and soft green rice-stalks grow
Each year in greater plenty, maize and millet
Choke up the fields and block the winding valleys
In wealthiest abundance. Still the people
Are placid, sleepy and have every day
More than is time enough to sun themselves
Outside the doorways of their light-built houses.
All these things are the same. Go you about
And look for what is changed in any street
And you'll not find one house built or pulled down.

SECOND TRAVELLER: And the court?

CHAMBERLAIN:

The court

—aye, there a change might be,
For peoples change not but a king grows old
And alters love and chooses better friends
To guide his counsel or delight his heart.
The old king dies and burns his life away
Daily like a glowing ember in a draught:
The keen air of youth's passionate ideas
Blows through his aged brain and fans it up
Into consuming fire.

SECOND TRAVELLER: He is lunatic?
Is that what you would say? An old man mad?
Perhaps he has a new wife in his bed
And wastes his scanty breath in loving her.

CHAMBERLAIN: He has taken a new wife into his
house
And yet his hands have not unloosed her girdle,

So much he holds her high in reverence.

FIRST TRAVELLER: A new queen wears the crown,
the king's a lover!

And gone back fifty years in boyishness

Sickly to glance upon a maiden's zone!

On with your news; discourse!

CHAMBERLAIN: O, beauty long
Has never lightened these dim walks and ways,
But now she dwells among us as a queen
And holds her court with us.

FIRST TRAVELLER: The old king loves
This newly planted slip of beauty, this
Stranger unheard of by the men we knew?

CHAMBERLAIN: He loves her and she lives alone
In the pavilion yonder by the lake,
And sleeps alone.

SECOND TRAVELLER: We come from countries
where men honestly
Lie if the need be but dress up no riddles
That cloak the truth and leave its heart unchanged.
Old chamberlain, your narrow, wrinkled eyes
Perplex me.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Peace! the manner of these
strange men
Is to conceal. We grow too old, we two,
And too much versed in our wide-travelling
To cry this land up and that land down.
All peoples are bright butterflies to me,
Rejoicing me in variance. As well desire
That all the birds of the earth should sing one song
As that all men should show one face to us.

CHAMBERLAIN: Yet have I spoken truth. The
king's new wife

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Is virgin still.

SECOND TRAVELLER: And you called her beauty's self?

Or is she some princess from lower China,
As stiff and ugly as the treaty-seal
Whose part she plays?

CHAMBERLAIN: She is most beautiful.
And therefore the king mounts not her chaste bed,
Because he dares not till she beckon him.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Is he become a dotard, straitly bound
By an imaginary chain? O sorrow!
That the great wise old king should stoop to beg
A woman's kisses in senility.

CHAMBERLAIN: She is a slave,
Her father's name and house alike unknown,
Her limbs and life being subject to the law,
To whipping, tearing, branding and the wheel
If she should disobey. A distant Viceroy,
Out of a city high among the mountains,
Sent her, a chosen gift, to please the king,
With fifty mounted men to be her guard.
They rode around her sternly with drawn swords,
She resting in their midst as easily
As doth a slight flower in a fold of the rocks
Where soil has gathered and birds dropped a seed.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Did she, on seeing, make her lord a slave?

CHAMBERLAIN: She gave the king a letter and stood mute
With folded hands before the dragon-throne
And quiet lips and all submissive eyes.
But when he had read it and had gazed on her

He drew her to his side and on his seat
And bade her rule his courtiers, which she does
With words and glances, drawing reverence
From bearded barons and old generals.
Even the ribald young men of the court
For whom to jest is such occasion now
Hush their light tongues and gravely speak of her
With worship.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Do you speak to us of her,
Catalogue all her beauties and declare
Her virtues to us.

CHAMBERLAIN: It was recently
You called me old,
Spoke of my narrow and my wrinkled eyes,
Too narrow, too wrinkled to let beauty in,
And age has withered up my lively tongue
That cannot now discourse of lovely things.
There are younger men than I to speak of her.

A young COURTIER crosses the stage

FIRST TRAVELLER (*approaching him*): Be done with
those soft dreams your eyes betray,
Young lord, and tell me what thing is the queen?
COURTIER: She is an arrow flown against the
wind. *He passes out*

SECOND TRAVELLER: The one's too cold to speak
and all the rest
Too hot for reason. She's a woman doubtless
Who in the crowd of younger courtiers
Will find a lover nearly to her choice
And make the best of him. Till then she keeps
The aged doddering king out of her bed

And by a feignèd mystery chains the court
In worship of her.

FIRST TRAVELLER: But the king was wise
And in his veins the blood ran still and true
When last we sojourned here.

CHAMBERLAIN: The king is wise
But now his wisdom is a fierier sort;
Not the tame learning of sedentary sages
But a fierce active knowledge that destroys
And feeds upon the instrument it uses.
He rises early, goes about his day
With such quick zest and uncontrolled desire
That the inmost chambers of the sacred house
Hear now a sound till this unknown to them,
Rustling of royal silks in haste that pass.

FIRST TRAVELLER: O marvellous transformation!
The old grave king
Who ruled his happy kingdom soberly,
Surrounded by the gravest mandarins,
That ever China knew! I am amazed.
He will wear armour now and go to war,
Waving his sword beneath the dragon-banner,
And dream of conquest like an untaught boy.
CHAMBERLAIN: Deem not the king is grown again
a child.

He is most wise, I say, and all his passions
Are governed by a fire beyond our sight.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Are you too fallen a slave
to this strange girl?
Behind the riddle of your changeless eyes
I half see mysteries moving. We have known
In our own land how courts are set aflame
And princes maddened for a worthless woman,

And the old tales tell, which we hold for truth,
How empires vaster than we now obey
Hung in the fingers of an idle queen,
Such power has beauty had in Italy.
But here! You cluster round your river mud
And tend the rice-crop, year on patient year,
And the grave kings succeed eternally
One to another in unbroken peace.
What should you know of love and lust and war,
Parricide, matricide and fratricide,
Fire, rapine and the sheathless thirsty sword
And all the ills that women bring on princes?
I will not yet believe it.

FIRST TRAVELLER: How stands the prince
In this new turmoil of the wildered court,
Who when we last were here was next the throne,
His father's chosen son?

CHAMBERLAIN: He is grown grave.
Even as the king has waxed in youthfulness,
So he in gravity and the look of years.
You were his friends before but you'll be fortune'd
If now he will exchange five words with you.

SECOND TRAVELLER: The court is surely mazed.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Changed at the heart.
And yet the land as we came through it here
Slept on its old and well-remembered sleep.
The light junks glided on the yellow stream,
The country, right and left, an endless field
Of greening crops in tranquil busyness
Lay like a sleepy hive. Your working people
Stood quietly to their labour. Yet, in our absence,
Time has been busy and remorseless change
Fretting away the features of our love

And laying down strange shapes to meet our touch.
 Even here the halls and gardens are the same:
 I do remember that old climbing jasmin,
 Whose gnarlèd roots start stiffly from the ground
 In writhen nakedness but higher up
 Burst in a boundless fountain of white flowers.
 Here in this garden once with care you taught me
 The secrets of your white-haired scientists,
 Compass and printing-press and dreadful dust,
 That being lit will blow great walls apart,
 Secrets I carried back to see despised
 In mine own native land, where yet they grow
 —And now one secret you withhold from me.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Who is this man that walks
 with blackened brow

And frowning purpose? Is it the general
 That swept with purifying flame the hills
 Which were infect with rebels?

CHAMBERLAIN: It is he.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Ask, ask of him!

The GENERAL crosses the stage

FIRST TRAVELLER: You were my friend when first
 I visited
 The court of China.

The GENERAL stands and stares at him

Tell, O, tell me now
 Who is this queen, this mystery shrouded woman
 Who captivates the king and wraps up all
 In a close-meshèd veil of sorcery?
 Tell me, I pray you, for you are a man
 In the high summer of a human life,

Ripe yet not buried in the mound of years,
Master of life, experienced in death,
Having led armies and commanded men.

GENERAL: She is a trumpet blowing to distant wars.

FIRST TRAVELLER: You tell me nothing—or much.

GENERAL: No more—no more.

He passes out

SECOND TRAVELLER: Are they all mad?

CHAMBERLAIN: The court is breaking up
And all are passing out.

SECOND TRAVELLER. Here comes the prince
With chin reposing gravely on his breast
And his still hands folded behind his back.
I dare not speak to him.

FIRST TRAVELLER: But I will speak
Because this mystery presses on my heart.
He is yet young, he hath not thirty years:
His icy posture is not natural
Even in a young man of this strange land.
Perhaps to see his ancient friends again
Will melt his blood for any purposes.

The PRINCE enters

SECOND TRAVELLER: He is not the same as these
are, for his face
Is sorrowful. Here there's no mystery.
I have not in this country seen a man
Whose countenance was marked as this man's is,
Showing what all they hide.

FIRST TRAVELLER:

Beloved lord!

The curves of cheek and breast and archèd foot,
 Explain the eyes' soft splendour.

SECOND TRAVELLER: In our land,
 Poets tell more than this and they set out
 How she spreads wide her arms to take her lover,
 And how her soft lips meet and answer his
 Dumbly.

PRINCE: I said no single word of love,
 But only that the queen's bright excellence
 Is far beyond my praise. O, she is lovely
 Even as a pearl new-taken from the sea:
 She moves in radiance through the wildered court
 And the gay silks that hide her sweetly flow
 About the rhythmic motion of her easy limbs.
 You know how we wake one morning here to find
 Outside our opened windows the cherry-tree
 Suddenly blooming. Our hearts are then amazed
 And falter with the consciousness of beauty.

He turns half away and is silent

FIRST TRAVELLER (*softly*): She is so fair, my lord?

CHAMBERLAIN (*secretly*): He wears away
 And perishes in contemplation
 Of the bright queen. O woe, woe for China!

SECOND TRAVELLER (*secretly*): All is changed then,
 if these men lose their masks
 And in their narrow Oriental eyes
 Love and fear show so plainly.

PRINCE: When she speaks,
 Like the strange cadences of modal songs,
 Her words at once perplex and charm the ear.

He stops as if choked, and sways on his feet

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SECOND TRAVELLER: Look to the prince! Quickly!

The prince is falling!

CHAMBERLAIN: If with your foreign eyes you'd
see the queen,

She walks now in the garden to the lake;
There you may see her, she in yellow silk.

*The TRAVELLERS run to the corner of the scene
to watch*

The PRINCE falls heavily in a swoon

CHAMBERLAIN (*bending over him*): I cannot wake
him, but he is not dead.

Send for a doctor quickly!

FIRST TRAVELLER (*turning back*): Could you see
her?

SECOND TRAVELLER: A moment. She's a girl
that's well enough

But yellow as these Chinese women are,
Though not so much as they. She did not smile
But seriously went upon her way,
Holding a fan. What did you see in her?

FIRST TRAVELLER: Nothing, for I am old and my
weak eyes
Peered watering down the avenue and ached
And could not yet descry her. I grow old
And can see nothing.

CHAMBERLAIN: Bring a doctor quickly!
The prince lies yet unstirring in his swoon:
I cannot wake him!

*As the TRAVELLERS run to him and bend over
the PRINCE, the Curtain falls*

SECOND ACT

*The QUEEN's Pavilion in the gardens of the palace.
The QUEEN is discovered before her mirror.*

QUEEN: Shall I put almond-blossom in my hair
Or flowers of jasmin? Shall I tie it up
With yellow silk or white? Ah, petty fool,
What strange and small perplexities are these
And womanish! to please a senseless thing,
An unexpressed mirror, night by night,
That nightly shows again my own poor praise
And mocks me in reflexion.
The almond blossoms best where God has sown it:
Yonder beside the sleeping lake it stands,
A bare tree misted over with faint flowers,
And the wind gently taps a loose trail to and fro,
Shaking the perfume free.
How still the time is, yet the air's alive
And all its separate particles aquiver
Work madly on my senses and my veins
Till my blood runs like the spilt quicksilver
Upon the chemist's table, that not rests
But smoothly courses on. O darling flowers!
Is it the springtime moving in my body,
The soft and piercing air that breathes on me,
Is it the sight of young and tender grass
Creeping across the lawn, that wakes in me

This sweet and poignant restlessness of will?
The bright tints of the figured silks I wear,
The soft-hued shadows lying in their folds,
Where bird and beast and blossom, strangely
worked

In golden threads and silver, are confounded
And lie together in a shining dusk,
These fair and gracious things, these gorgeous
toys,

And the living emblems of the happy season
Strike and afflict mine eyes with loveliness.
Would that the day were done and darkness here!
For I have watched through ten full hours of light,
From the pale morning to this coloured time,
And every minute stuffed with sights and sounds,
Odours and shapes that stab the naked sense
With too much beauty and too keen a joy;
And still the long hours float upon their way,
Large with contentment, rich with happiness,
And in conclusion bring the night with them.
Now the first shades are stealing on the earth
And weariness upon my limbs and eyes:
Already I can feel the darkness come
With sweet relaxing smells and wider sounds,
That are more gentle, and the gift of sleep. . . .

Two SLAVE GIRLS enter

What is your business here? I would be private.
FIRST SLAVE GIRL: Suffer, O shining mistress,
that we braid
With tender fingers your long lustrous hair
And knot it in a crown upon your head.
We have been taught by many years and whips

Our duty to a queen and where to place
Deftly her jewels with experienced hands,
How to arrange the falling folds of silk
Upon her breast and how to tie her shoes
And how to paint her lashes and her lips
With carmine and dark bistre.
We are long used in these things, we have learnt
With tears and bruises and the steady flow
Of our own warm blood running down our heels
Under the strokes of the house-steward's lash
To know our delicate business. Suffer then
That we may wait on you and tend your beauty,
That's worthy of skill so many tears have bought.

QUEEN: Ever at dusk two slave girls wait on me
With speeches thus entreating in their mouths,
Whom still I send away. Is there no end
To all this store of slaves within the house?
Are not the last yet come? I have no need
Of tiring-maids to deck me. Mine own hands
Are feat enough to drape my falling silks,
To braid my hair and knot it.
Mine own eyes and my mirror do suffice
To judge where lies the jewel meetliest
And where a blossom. Tell the steward this:
A slave girl at my elbow wearies me,
When most my heart desires to be alone.

SECOND SLAVE GIRL: Have pity on us, for we
dare not, lady.

What use are we except to tend a queen
And what man keeps the useless in his home
Save with extremity of evil use?
If you reject us, we go back again
To curses and the bare, stiff whipping-post,

The anguished stripping off of our thin gowns,
The cruel cord that's tied about our wrists
And the whistling leather falling on our backs,
Until our flesh vies with our smarting eyes
And weeps red tears, as they weep free and clear,
Both bitter salt.

FIRST SLAVE GIRL: O mistress, be inclined,
Most lovely lady, to look well on us.
We will be mute when we shall wait on you
And will no more disturb your lonely dreams
Than the light porcelain upon your table
Or the long pin that holds your heavy hair.
We are but things that live to do you service
And wait on beauty.

QUEEN: What advantage still
Hope you in serving me? What liberty
For idleness and wantonness and plays
More full of freedom than your state allows?

FIRST SLAVE GIRL: Alas, but we are penned and
prisoned now,
Who are so young that every day seems long
And yet is cruel swift in robbing us
Of precious years wherefrom a joy is due.
We should have pity from you, who can tell
How freely pity should be given to youth,
Licence our lovers freely to entertain,
Where now a sour, hard steward shuts us up,
Bolts close our doors, watches our lattices
For sheets let down or candles set as signs
To guide our pleasure.

QUEEN: And 'tis thus you'd use me?
Make me a lucky darkness
To hide your paramours?

FIRST SLAVE GIRL: O, you would feel
Compassion for our state, for you are young
And know how greedily time eats the years
Of unused youth.

SECOND SLAVE GIRL (*secretly*): Too hot, too hot!
Be cold!

You speak new words to her, she hath not loved.

QUEEN: You know this frenzy, then, which,
poets tell,

Perplexes men and women, inflames their blood
To fevers and blushing and their sensible tongues
To utter foolish oaths? I have not loved.

My wits are quiet, I am not distraught,
I reason unperturbed, my cheeks are cool,
I sleep all night in peace, I do not wake
Murmuring a name with tears.

FIRST SLAVE GIRL: O, are you happy?

QUEEN: I have so smooth and delicate a life,
I cannot tell. I live from day to day,
So thrilling with a sweet and glad unease
In expectation of to-morrow's gladness,
That all my joy's part pain and want of rest.

SECOND SLAVE GIRL: But your delight, O lady,
when it comes,

Does it stop up your pulses, seal your eyes
Against the passage of the light-winged hours
And fill your heart so that you lose all sense
Of earth and being and the weight of time?
For this is love and to find this we love.

QUEEN: My heart beats faster sometimes but not
knocks

Against my side in hasty agony,
Great heavy beats, prolonged and intervalled,

As they say lovers' do.

FIRST SLAVE GIRL: But when our hearts
Burst with a joy we cannot tell from pain,
We know we love indeed.

QUEEN: But what is this?
To hold debate upon a metaphysic,
A very nothing, smoke of smoke, begotten
By empty heat out of vacuity.
You have too much tricked me with your idle tales:
This is enough, begone. Your flesh is free,
No stripes shall mark it, no blood stain it more
For my ingratitude. Go now in peace;
Who whips you, he himself shall know the lash,
As the king loves me. Be my word your shield.

FIRST SLAVE GIRL: Our skill is wasted; we are
useless things.

SECOND SLAVE GIRL: Wasted and worse than
useless, for the queen
Hath shown offence at us.

FIRST SLAVE GIRL: We have offended, we are
miserable,
Unfit to attend upon so bright a queen,
And all our lore in beauty is quite lost.
We will go hence and creep to hide in shame;
We are worthy to be whipped and if the steward
Dares not to flog us, we will whip each other
And expiate with self-inflicted blows
Our grave offences.

QUEEN: Peace, ye noisy children;
The air is quiet, all the birds are hushed
And you alone make echo my light walls
With false complaint and crying.

FIRST SLAVE GIRL:

Look! O look!

The king is walking down the avenue
 Wrapped in deep converse with two ancient men.
 An almond-petal settles on his beard. . . .

SECOND SLAVE GIRL: Let us be gone. His frowning wrinkled face

That hath no kinship with our youthful cheeks
 Makes me afraid. What would his anger be
 If he should find us by the queen refused?
 Let us escape him.

The KING enters

KING: Loud and loud and loud
 Swell the light voices down the avenue
 And greet me coming hither, as though I came
 Into a covert full of springtime birds.

QUEEN: Ah me ungrateful! I have sent again
 Your gifts away.

KING: Will you be lonely still
 And still reject the emblems of a queen?
 Let it be as you wish. You shall be pleased,
 If that all I can give be not to give.
 Get you hence, children.

The SLAVE GIRLS go out

This is my hour of colloquy with you,
 Most sweet refreshment when the day is done.

QUEEN: I am your slave.

KING: So still you say,
 Which in another I should deem humility
 Put on for mocking, but your heart is true.
 Happy am I to have so fair a slave,
 So wise a servant, whom another king
 Would not dare call his queen or come to her

Save with gifts loaded, pain expecting eyes
And heart bowed down for tyranny and stripes.
This day is done,
One of my last, for I draw on in age
And there is nothing that is left of it,
Save traces of the sun about the air,
Unless you approve my deeds and give them savour
With good words and sweet nodding of the head.
Listen! The governor of the Mountain Province,
Who spoiled a poor man's patch of hard-raised
millet

For private vengeance, is cast down and shamed.
To-day I judged him in the attentive court,
Took all his honours from him, turned him off,
Free and disgraced.

QUEEN: O, that was kingly done!

KING: Now he shall earn his bread and know
how evil

It is to lose a treasure hardly earned.

QUEEN: O, it is evil to be robbed of all,
Stripped, beaten down. The poor must still be sad;
They lose so much because they have so little,
And the thin meal, that would disgust our
stomachs,

Is doubly bitter set upon their tables,
Seasoned with doubt and sauced with aching fear.
Tell me, the harbour-master of the port,
Who thieved from the poor fishermen half their
catch,

When they brought their salt vessels to his piers,
How has he fared to-day? I much misliked
The stout and prosperous seeming of his face
Against the pinched and pitiful regard

Of his accusers. He were guilty enough
To have ruled so fatly over men so thin.

KING: I had a paper from the governor
Which weightily set forth his services,
How he has been a lion in our part
To put down smugglers, how he gave the alarm,
Five years gone, when the Indian fleet approached,
Threatening the harbour.

QUEEN: And for this you spared him?

KING *nods*

QUEEN: What services can outweigh his injustice?

O my dear lord, if he had asked a guerdon
For these his deeds and you had granted it,
When he proceeded: Give me leave to pill
And rob the king's poor subjects, you'd have
answered—

What would you have said, my lord? O, it is shame
That thus the poor can sweat and suffer still,
Even when the ruler is so wise a man
And my heart sickens when I think of all
The scattered kingdoms of the unhappy earth
Where cruel men and careless boys are crowned.

KING (*after a moment's silence*): You are just,
And in the heat and hurry of your youth
You follow still unswayed the difficult path
Which an old king's feet cannot keep for long
Without your guidance. I will put him down,
As you commanded me. I am ashamed.
I will put him down; there shall be an end of him.
Yet do not think that I to pleasure you
Do justice on my subjects. You have shown me

How glad a thing is justice and how glad
A king's heart is in judging righteously.
I would not that the good deeds of your hand
Should be the like of any concubine's
Boons begged at midnight in the shameful bed.

QUEEN: They will not say so, who have known
your virtue.

You have given me your riches and your love
And I am happy in the much I have.
It is enough for me and I will study
How to repay you with the scanty gifts
That are my own indeed. I will not steal
Any least shred of your benevolent deeds
To deck my queenship with.

KING:

But all is yours

And I am yours and you are grown my life,
A new blood beating in my ancient pulse.
For there are voices speaking in young blood,
Which an old heart no longer hears. They tell
Of truth and justice and brave work to do.
I do remember when they were my own;
It is long since. . . .

He stands musing

I bring you here a gift,
Strange and of value to the curious mind,
Two travellers from the unimagined West,
Who were my guests once and who loved me well,
Which love has brought them hither once again
A perilous journey through the springless waste.
They were my friends and they are very wise,
They have large learning and a store of tales
Fit to delight a queen.

QUEEN: ' It shall be joy
 Enough to welcome them if they have loved you.
 KING (*going to the door*): They rest their bodies
 on a green soft bank
 And breathe in quietly the excellent air.
 What peace and knowledge rest within their eyes!
 The calm sweet memory of a coloured life
 Shines in the stirless lids. O, they are happy,
 Who are not weary save with labour done
 And toil accomplished. So may I rest some day
 But the end approaches and the goal not yet.
 Come, friends. The queen invites you; you may
 come.

The TRAVELLERS enter

FIRST TRAVELLER: The love and reverence we
 bore the king
 Is now not halved but doubled for your sake.
 Take then our love, O lady, and our prayers
 That China still may prosper in your rule.

SECOND TRAVELLER: We are two travellers, whose
 way has been
 Cast in the deserts where no beauty is.
 Now a strange gladness falls upon our hearts
 Merely to see you.

QUEEN: You have loved my lord
 And I accept your love. Halve it or double,
 The whole shall go to him; I could not stay
 So good a gift from him. Rise, travellers,
 For I am hungry for the tales you know.

FIRST TRAVELLER: O, we have come a long and
 weary way,
 Past all your fancy, lower than your dreams,

Through many dangers but most tedious
For you to hear of. Will a list set out
Of all the deserts we have suffered in
Take and rejoice your ears with entertainment,
Gobi and Shamo and the salten waste
Beyond Bokhara and the lonely marshes
That lie beside the desolate Caspian?
We went on weary feet, bestrode strange beasts,
Were passengers in foul and evil ships
And we are here. We stayed with many kings,
Splendid or barbarous, smooth-tongued or rough;
In hovels and in palaces alike
We lay awake all night in sweating fear
To feel the treacherous blade that severs throats
Of innocent sleeping men and no word said.
Once in Stamboul we saw a lady die,
A lovely lady who had done no hurt,
Trussed in a sacking like a market-beast
And flung to drown, when dawn with splendour
gilt
The bitter choking waters of her death,
Because she loved. And once in Samarcand,
The fabled town, we saw a beggar throned,
Who set the crown upon his greasy head
And gave the law out in a villain's voice
To silken lords, who stooped and kissed his foot,
And in Thibeth we saw the monasteries,
Where the Grand Lama rules his drowsy monks,
Who waste the day with turning of a wheel,
That serves instead of grace and gracious deeds.
How ticklish and alive is memory!
Stir but the brain and the pot boils and bubbles
And steams out pictures of the endless road,

How here we went a day through lofty tops
By tracks and mountain-paths that scare the sense
And over smooth, unfriendly fields of ice
And jutting shelves and cornices of snow
That trembled as we trod, the while the wind
Curling round graven buttresses of rock
Played like an icy lightning in the air
And froze our purposes; and how we came
Heavily at the end of the afternoon
Over long slopes of short and bitten grass
On to the shoulder of a blowing hill
And saw the dreaming country spread beneath
Under the faint mist and the falling sun
Wrapt in a magic peace. There we have stood
And let our burdens drop and breathed again
The wreathing sweetness of the valley air
That rises warmly from frequented fields
To cheer the naked hills. O, we have stood
Silent and felt a singing in our hearts
To see how patient, careful man has made
A garden of his earth.
Here we went sweating up a narrow, stony
Root-cumbered lane between low-arching trees
In crushing darkness that could not conceal
The steepness of the wooded mountain-side
And there we halted in a shallow glade,
Whose marshy middle the blue gentian decked,
And slept uneasily and woke at dawn
With fever fretting softly at our bones.
These are the ornaments of voyagers,
This hand a camel crushed in Turkestan,
This limping heel a Tartar's arrow struck,
This bended back with ague hath been doubled

All a long night amid the Volga's reeds;
But these mine eyes are bright for having seen
Death and escape, murder and treachery
And sunrise in the mists of the high hills.
O, in the wide waste world there's much to see
For those who'll buy with danger!
Wonders lie thick as in a raree-show
And the showman is old Death. But we have seen,
Between the wide and the shuttered gates of day
And in the long, slow hours of perilous night,
'Twixt Tuscany where too the cherry blows
And your bright country, no town made for rest,
No vale that tempted us to lie in it,
Though dusty were our heads and torn our feet
With the long journey.

KING: So his epic's done

But briefly, though the end of it be good.

QUEEN: Old travellers, you are most fortunate,
You have purchased wonders wisely. . . .
I would see other lands and learn how there
The spring arises, how the blossoms grow
Mantling in beauty round the standing trees,
And burn away at last at summer's touch,
Leaving the naked fruit behind. I'd learn
If all men there are happy, ploughing, sowing
Or working stooped among the golden ears
Or taking the sweet apples from the boughs
And laying them by rows in country lofts
Or striding through the keen winds of the sea.
I have a great wish to go far to-day:
My body moves and turns within my silks,
Restlessness and I know not what of fear
Devour me.

KING: The sap mounting in the trees
 Draws your blood with it, for your blood's like sap,
 That goes to feed the topmost flowering bough.

QUEEN: There is something in me stirring like
 the sap,

A new sharp ache, a pain I would not lose.
 O, if I were a man, I'd take a horse
 And ride all night with stars to be my guide
 And echo for a groom to follow after.
 I'd ride all night until the mountains stood
 Patient beneath the flying hooves, and on,
 Along the causeway through the low, rich lands,
 High built and sure, beneath a young May moon
 Hung in the heavens, like a new-born moth,
 That only now unfolds her velvet wings,
 And ride still on and reach the palace gates,
 Weary and sated and prepared for rest,
 When peasants go out yawning to their fields.
 What is this racing madly in my veins?
 My eyes hurt me, my breasts hurt me and my
 hands

For thought of all the loveliness I see.

FIRST TRAVELLER: It is the spring, dear queen.

SECOND TRAVELLER (*unheard*): Perhaps—the
 spring!

QUEEN: Call me my groom, my lord, and bid
 him saddle

My too long stabled horse. Ah, he and I
 Alike have suffered in captivity
 Where generous spirits turn to acid sour.
 Will you call him, my lord, will you allow me
 To ride abroad—to-night—unguarded?

KING:

Ah!

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What would you? But I will not stay your wish
Nor linger in fulfilment.

QUEEN: Take no heed:
I am foolish and the empty breath of folly
Fades in intent as mist on winter days
Blown from the mouth.

KING: What would you?

QUEEN: Nothing now,
Save to be rested, to lose count of time
And have in peace dominion of my senses.

KING: The young have growing pains, which we
forget,
But which we'd feel again were't possible.

*The CHAMBERLAIN enters and throws himself
at the KING's feet*

CHAMBERLAIN: Supreme Magnificence of High-
est Heaven!

Your son—

QUEEN: The prince—

KING: My son?

CHAMBERLAIN: My lord, he lies
These eight hours in a still and deathly swoon,
Breathing, not sentient. All the doctor's art
Avails not on his body, and he lies
Under the yellow hangings of his bed
With pinched and bloodless face. His creeping
pulse

So dimly moves, with such faint finger marks
The passage of his life that scarce the blood
Runs through his slackened limbs. Three doctors
watch him,
Equally bowed with science and many years,

Who can do nothing. Still the swoon goes on.

QUEEN: O!

SECOND TRAVELLER (*unheard*): Mark the queen!

KING: He is my best-loved son,

And losing him—

FIRST TRAVELLER: My lord, we saw him fall
And guessed not that his sickness was so heavy,
We were even speaking with him.

QUEEN: Go to him

Quickly and take these learned men to him.

O, surely in the desert you have found

Strange herbs and charms our books are ignorant
of

And such may save him.

FIRST TRAVELLER: All the skill we have,
All drugs that now do fill our satchels, shall
With our good will attend on his disease
And we'll contrive his health.

QUEEN:

Then go, my lord,

For in such swoons the soul irresolute stands
In the mouth and nostrils, in the doors and portals
Of the warm comfortable body, loth
To leave her fashioned home yet pressed to go,
But will not if the right cure be but found.
Go to him quickly.

The Curtain falls

THIRD ACT

SCENE ONE

*The PRINCE'S chamber, with dimly burning lamps.
The PRINCE lies motionless in a bed which is hung
with yellow. Three old DOCTORS stand watching
him.*

FIRST DOCTOR: In my last medicine, in my final
charm,

There was no succour. All my essences
A thousand times distilled by cunning slaves
And filtered and refined till every drop
Burns and is bright with the residing power,
All these administered have no effect
Upon his magic and unnatural sleep.

SECOND DOCTOR: Still the pulse changes not.

THIRD DOCTOR: When you can feel it,
It beats at the same slow unveering rate,
Such speed as scarce will keep a snake alive,
The slowest breathing of all blooded things.

SECOND DOCTOR: Should we try toads' lungs
boiled with cinnamon
And made into a plaster for the breast?
When I was young and daily sought the schools,
Quick rumour said a mighty doctor there,
One of my masters, saved a child with it,
Who lay a week in such a swoon as this,

Though he denied it.

THIRD DOCTOR: Ah, my amulet!
It should have saved him, if I had it now.
It came to me from old Confucius' time
And drove the strongest evils from their seat.
A patient stole it.

FIRST DOCTOR: See him lying there!
Sweet sirops and the sticky juice of fruits,
Fine juice of herbs and the medicinal earths,
Gum arabick compounded with pomegranates,
And sifted dust of powdered chrysoprase,
All I have used and still the trance unshaken
Laughs at my sweating pains.

THIRD DOCTOR: It is a devil,
Which with burnt paper and with holy words
We must expel from him.

SECOND DOCTOR: It is a worm,
Which lodges in a passage of the brain
And there impedes its working.

FIRST DOCTOR: None of these:
If it had been disease or worm or devil,
It should have yielded up to me ere this.
It is no sickness I was taught to meet,
My masters knew not of it.

THIRD DOCTOR: Nor mine either.

SECOND DOCTOR: God grant it may not be the
plague again
Come in another shape and deadlier
As it is wont to do.

FIRST DOCTOR: The plague!

THIRD DOCTOR: The plague!

FIRST DOCTOR: Put not this shape of evil in our
eyes

Which now must float between the light and us
 And haunt us. If this thing be true indeed,
 We three are doomed to die a dreadful death,
 With swelling in our loins and sweating blood
 And swollen tongues that stop the dying speech.
 When I was young, long ere you two were born,
 I saw the plague come down on us. It rose
 Out of the northward desert, where no man is
 And smote our borders. Then the people lay
 Groaning in heaps beside their stinking houses;
 For when a woman perished in a house
 Her husband would not come to bury her
 But stayed upon the threshold and there died.
 Sons brought not water to their sinking fathers;
 In the ungarnished house of government
 Rotted unhelped the tainted mandarins.
 All, all! it seemed—my father and my mother!
 And there, a child, I straitly vowed my life
 To healing and the tending of men's bodies;
 All labour spent in vain, for now a cause
 Arises needing my most delicate skill
 And finds me wanting. O, I am ashamed!

SECOND DOCTOR: No man continues long in this
 ill posture;
 If the prince wake not now, he dies.

THIRD DOCTOR:

And we?

FIRST DOCTOR: I fear the old king in his grief.

And I

SECOND DOCTOR:

Fear for the king. Have you not noticed him,
 How he is changed, how all his looks and customs
 Are dangerously altered from their wont?
 I have distinguished in him many signs
 Of ominous reading. In his age he lives

As though his body were grown young again
And his dry veins were flushed with youthful blood
To wash out the old channels, long disused,
Of vehemence and royal energy.
Our honoured scientists have set it down,
Living a long time closeted with books,
In solitude to water budding thought,
How these things token dangerous maladies
And slow diseases that assail the brain.
He grows as mad as those that waste in prison,
Tearing the straw behind the pitiless bars,
And did no sceptre nor no royal robes
Assure him from their fate, he'd lie with them.

FIRST DOCTOR: The queen has touched the
springs of youth in him,
Renewed his wasting sinews, made more supple
His hardening arteries
And breathed a new and an amazing strength
Into his nostrils and his panting lungs.

SECOND DOCTOR: She is a woman visibly un-
sound,
Whose passion for defending of the weak
And febrile love of colours and bright flowers
Proclaim her tainted and degenerate.
The prince himself, who lies there hardly breath-
ing,

Is plainly epileptic, and his case,
Though past the bounds of any practical skill,
Is not beyond the grasp of theory.
We doctors know by reading of much print
What flaws and faults to find in royal houses.

THIRD DOCTOR: Softly! The king comes and a
train with him.

SECOND DOCTOR: Stand round the prince and take his pulse again.

The DOCTORS go to the bedside and the FIRST DOCTOR takes the PRINCE'S wrist. The KING enters, followed by the TRAVELLERS and the CHAMBERLAIN

FIRST DOCTOR (*solemnly*): His blood goes slowly as a hill-fed river

In deepest winter when no snow doth melt.

KING: Put up your drugs, put up your instruments,

O men of little worth! Is it for this

The state has taught you and has nourished you

So many years till your long beards are grey?

FIRST DOCTOR (*bowing*): Slay us, O mighty monarch, but delay

Our death a little, for these foreigners

Will surely heal the prince and we'd observe

The unsuspected cure. Why, it is true

That we are men of base and little worth;

But grant us this, the last request we make,

For we are famished even now for knowledge.

Grant it, great lord; we would learn one thing more

Before we die.

SECOND DOCTOR (*bowing*): There is no end to learning

And even in the doorway of the grave,

A man may turn his head to read one line

Before departing.

THIRD DOCTOR (*bowing*): Let us not go down To ignorant death and lie unlearned corpses.

For surely still our curious ghosts would walk,
With pens and tablets in their shadowy hands,
To learn this one thing more.

KING: Be silent, men
Of vanity and flatulent, swollen science,
Whom but to hear is to abhor. Begone!

SECOND DOCTOR (*secretly*): Thank God for it.

FIRST DOCTOR: We will depart, my lord.

The three DOCTORS bow deeply and go out

KING: Go to him, friends. My only hope's in you.

FIRST TRAVELLER: I have looked at him, tested
his pulse and heart,
Lifted his lids and looked upon his eyes,
And hearkened his scant breath, but there's no salve
That ever I have heard of would revive him.
This is a sickness that is strange to me,
And I've seen many men die many deaths,
Scurvy and leprosy and the damp ague
That breaks the bones with its strong shivering.
But this is none of these.

KING: He is alive,
They tell me, though his sleep resembles death.
Is there no man can help him and help me?
The new-born power, so gracious in my hands,
Runs through my fingers now like falling water.
And I am helpless. Why, a king can kill
With any sort of death, but when he stands
At the sad bedside of his dying son,
He is as powerless as another man.

CHAMBERLAIN: O woe, woe, woe on China! Now
is all

The fabric of the high-arched kingdom gone
And the fair provinces, the Mountain Province,
The Province of the Plain, the River Province,
The Border Countries and the teeming port
And cities where the wise old Viceroys rule,
Shaking their honoured governmental heads,
All these are wounded. O, he is a prince
That is a paragon of youthful virtues
And is fulfilled of unexampled good!

KING: Had I not kingly state and governance,
I'd rave as he does.

CHAMBERLAIN: Is there nought indeed?
Can you not save him?

FIRST TRAVELLER: He's in the hands of God.
And hangs suspended by a viewless chain
High out of our perception.

CHAMBERLAIN: I've a plan,
If but the king will hear me.

KING: Speak, old servant.

CHAMBERLAIN: With these poor doctors we've
not used up yet

The treasures of the wisdom of the realm.
In a corner of the royal library,
Hidden by books heaped like a monument,
Sits an old sage, old beyond reckoning,
To whom I am a child. He studies there
And studied there when you and I were young,
Distilling all the toil of his long life,
All honey gathered from his dusty flowers,
To make one page in the great dictionary.
Who knows what he has found in such a time,
Strange remedies in unaccustomed script
And charms by us forgotten?

Who is the murderer?

OLD SCHOLAR: No murder this!

Full well I know how mind can shatter mind
With airy weight and blows. You walk your ways,
Slaying in blindest ignorance with a thought
And maiming with desires. O foolish men!
Who are most like to children armed with daggers
Or playing with huge poisons. Learn of my
wisdom,

Poor wisdom! that still makes a crutch for fools
And may not walk alone. I bid you now
Seek out the prince's servants and his friends,
All that are daily round him, all that touch
His life materially with passing hands
Or with the frailest woven web of thought.
Then let them walk beside him as he lies
And touch him, each one gently on the brow;
The right man's touch will call him back to life.
Let what I bid be done. Farewell!

He goes out

CHAMBERLAIN:

He is gone!

KING: Let what he bids be done. It is a chance
Built up too high and slender in the fancy
To bear the weight of any useful hope,
Yet we will try it.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Call the prince's servants!

KING: Stay!

CHAMBERLAIN: Ah, my lord—

KING: I faint, my will gives way,

I cannot see it. O, put off the test.

Hope grows, a wretched seedling in my heart,
With pale and sapless leaves and drooping stem;

Let me a moment nourish it. Let me—

SECOND TRAVELLER: Hold him, he shakes—

FIRST TRAVELLER: Your hand behind his
shoulders,

So!—

KING: I am better. Look not thus with fear
On age's and on grief's infirmity.

Give me a moment. I can breathe again.

O, how it caught my heart.

FIRST TRAVELLER: We'll lead you hence
Into your own apartments and with you
Await the outcome of the trial.

KING: No!

I will not go so far, I'll stay with him
And sooner learn if there be any hope.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Wait till the morning's light

KING: I could not sleep
And could not watch all night and nothing done.
Give me a moment. I am better now.

The thing shall now be done.

CHAMBERLAIN: We'll draw the curtain
That shuts the alcove off. You shall not see
The long procession going by and by
Or watch with sick hope and o'erstrained heart
Each hand raised up to touch him.

He draws a curtain hiding the bed

I will go
And set the train in motion. As the first
Go by his bed, I'll marshal up the rest
And send swift messengers about the city
To fetch his noble friends.

He goes out

SECOND TRAVELLER: We'll not despair,
While anything is doing. Sit, my lord;
Shall we with coloured travellers' tales beguile you?

KING: To-day I have been happy as a youth
For all the toils of kingship had grown light
And turned to toys which I manipulated
With easy fingers. Now here is a woe
Beyond the great new wisdom I have learnt.
It passes me: I am too old a man.

FIRST TRAVELLER: But not so old as I nor yet so
worn
With dangers.

KING: Surely that step was the first!
There goes another and another now.

The CHAMBERLAIN comes in

CHAMBERLAIN: I have set the court in motion
now and all
Pass in an anxious stream beside the bed
For any commoner may have the touch
Of curing sickness, formerly reserved
For kings alone.

KING: Stay with us now, old friend.
I need all my old friends now.

FIRST TRAVELLER: We are here.

KING: I'll not forget it.

CHAMBERLAIN (*after a pause*): Still the train goes
on,
Guards, waiting-maids, the servants of the bath,
Gardeners, grooms and all the varletry
That fills the court.

FIRST TRAVELLER: But still as it goes on
Hope lingers. Till the last poor slave has been

Let me a moment nourish it. Let me—

SECOND TRAVELLER: Hold him, he shakes—

FIRST TRAVELLER: Your hand behind his
shoulders,

So!—

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Guards, waiting-maids, the servants of the bath,
Gardeners, grooms and all the varletry
That fills the court.

FIRST TRAVELLER: But still as it goes on
Hope lingers. Till the last poor slave has been

We'll not despair of him.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Still they go on
And still I hear the sound of those to come.

The Curtain falls

SCENE TWO

The same, not long before the dawn, with the curtain still hiding the PRINCE'S bed. The KING, the two TRAVELLERS and the CHAMBERLAIN sit round a small brazier, in which charcoal is burning.

SECOND TRAVELLER: How all night long my flesh
has crawled to hear

The shuffling and the laughter going by,
The steady tramp of the insensate feet
Of the poor slaves, who came to try their touch
And in mechanical procession tread
Our last and fading hopes to dust.
How they have laughed and nudged and clasped
at hands

And pulled at garments and gone breathless by,
The idiots, to whom anything that's strange
Makes an occasion for a holiday.

What cookmaid was it that went by just now,
With greasy clothes and breath of very kitchen
And harsh loud piercing whisper, out of sight?
Was she the last to go?

FIRST TRAVELLER: The last has gone
Two hours back in the dead and depth of night.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Two hours gone! but a
sound—just here—just now—

That weary caravan of dwindling hope.

FIRST TRAVELLER: The night is not yet gone and
you are weary.

Lay back your head upon the pillow there
And sleep awhile.

KING: O, I am fain of sleep.

He lies back again and sleeps

SECOND TRAVELLER: What's to be done now?

FIRST TRAVELLER: Let the dead king sleep,
Beside his son that is alive in death,
For there is nothing left. All stratagems,
Devices and procurings of the wise
Are shown as empty and as useless things,
As dances of the desert dervish-doctors,
Who mock the sick with leaps and attitudes,
Which we have mocked at. There is nothing left,
Save to expect the coming of the day
And ruin with it.

CHAMBERLAIN: Still the day comes on;
The fountain now stands out all silvery clear,
That through the sad hours beat upon my brain
With dull recurrence of its falling drops.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Did you not say the land
slept on unchanged?

CHAMBERLAIN: All was the same—and still the
country sleeps

In comfort unawakened till this day,
Which I prevent not, which I will not flee,
Which shall enwrap us with its dawning fear,
As we sit still and wait on its approach.
But what shall be thereafter well I know
And what the evils falling on the state.

THE QUEEN OF CHINA

99

In a few years this country shall decay,
Our joyous houses and our porcelain towers
Shall be thrown down and all the garden-walks
Be choked with darnel and the hungry thistle
And barren weeds that turn the land to waste.
The enemy shall cast us down and rise
In hideous triumph on our fallen bodies:
The capital shall be deserted, yea,
The planks of the thronged wharves shall warp
and start,
Strange river-snails crawl over them, the worms
That in the river's bottom have their home
Shall eat with puny teeth the seasoned baulks
And bring the whole to ruin. The canals,
Placid and level, only now disturbed
By passage of our wealthy merchandise,
Shall be stopped up with growth of water-weed
And spread their sluggish floods among the crops.
The royal roads shall pit and rut and break
With softening rain and the disrupting frost.
Yea, even the goldfish in the garden-court
Shall weep this day,
For when our city's fired, their bowl will crack
And leave them to be choked in bitter air.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Must all the people slumber
with the prince
Nor wake at any call to know these wrongs?

CHAMBERLAIN: You know not how we are ringed
with enemies.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Soften your voices. Leave the
king to sleep,

Till the full sun is risen on the earth.
There is miraculous healing in the light

For broken spirits, there's no cordial
For grief that can be likened to the sun,
No cloak beneath which sorrow festers more
Than darkness and there is no poison known,
That worse can rankle in the spiritual wound,
Than this gray merciless light of early dawn.

CHAMBERLAIN: The king sleeps well. Would
that I too could sleep
And find forgetfulness of misery.

SECOND TRAVELLER: But he is sicker than his
helpless son.
See how the bright eyes through the wearing lids
Shine out with fever, how his wasting hands
Grow thinner, whiter. He is close to death.
O, fetch the doctors for him!

CHAMBERLAIN: They have fled,
Fearing his wrath most foolishly.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Alas!
For the wise men whose wisdom fails them now.
How are we better?

FIRST TRAVELLER: Soft! the king awakes!

KING: I have slept long and still mine eyes are
heavy;
You should have waked me, I have slept too
long.

FIRST TRAVELLER: You have slept ten minutes,
sire. Lie down again
For you are weary and in need of rest
And we will wake you at a better time.

KING: I have slept too long already. Now I know
Why I am weary. Is the last one gone?

CHAMBERLAIN: The last has gone and left no
hope behind.

KING: And my son sleeps yet? Has not once he stirred?

FIRST TRAVELLER: His breathing has not altered through the night,

Not even in the dim and dreadful hour

When the waking are most sad and the sick oft die.

KING: Send for that ancient man again. I'll ask him

If he has used up all his armoury

Of quaint extravagant devices now.

Strange that we do expect beneath the veil

Of rustic mannerlessness in learned men

A more than common wisdom.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Let him sleep, sire,
And you too sleep. There is no profit now
In waking.

KING: I will see him, I will ask him
What he can do—whether he— Send for him!

SECOND TRAVELLER: Let it all rest, my lord, I do
implore you,
Till there's warm light to see by.

KING (*as if dazed or in a dream*): Send for him!
I am told to ask you for him.

*The FIRST TRAVELLER makes a sign that the KING
is to be obeyed*

CHAMBERLAIN: I will bring him.
He rises early and is with his books
By the first light. I'll bring him to you soon.

He goes out

FIRST TRAVELLER: Give me your hands, sir. They
are cold and I

Will warm them 'twixt my palms.

KING: I am all cold
And neither sunshine nor the bright coal-fire
Nor human blood can warm my limbs again,
For the chill spreads outward, moving from the
heart.

The CHAMBERLAIN comes in, followed by the
OLD SCHOLAR

KING (*listlessly*): Are you so old that you have
done with sleep,
To be thus early playing with your books?

OLD SCHOLAR: Why have you sent for me?

KING: You have cured my son,
Have you not cured him? Go and look at him,
How the sweet sleep of health doth wrap him up
And sooth his body.

FIRST TRAVELLER (*secretly*): This is too much pain
And we are tightened even to cracking point.
(*Aloud*) Observe your patient, old and learned
doctor,

On whom your fine device has fallen as light
As snow on water. Stay among your pens!
You have held us all a night with foolish hopes
And cloaked our brains in fancy till the dawn
With cold and pitiless finger pointed at us
For fools in the light's eyes and in our own.

OLD SCHOLAR: Is the Prince dead?

FIRST TRAVELLER: He sleeps
and sleeps and sleeps
Untouched by your contrivings.

OLD SCHOLAR: This is strange!
I am amazed. My science is not vain:

I have not duped myself with lying arts
And transient, to gather empty praise.

KING: The King dismisses you; stay here no longer.

I might have racked you but I have no will
To add to the world's sum of pain.

OLD SCHOLAR: Softly, my friend; I am no charlatan.

Have you observed with order what I bade you?
Have all passed by him and laid hands on him?

CHAMBERLAIN: All have gone by and played the sorry part.

The slaves infect the chamber with their breath
Of kitchens hot and the rank stable-smells
To no avail.

OLD SCHOLAR: Have all his friends gone by?

FIRST TRAVELLER: Even we, we four, when waiting grew too long,

To break the night, made spaces in the file
And touched his head ourselves and left him sleeping.

OLD SCHOLAR: Have all the women passed?

SECOND TRAVELLER (*sharply but secretly*): Unlucky word!

FIRST TRAVELLER: The youngest slave that crouches at the spit

Has touched the Prince.

OLD SCHOLAR: Has the Queen been here?

There is a dead silence

KING: Who speaks of the Queen?

CHAMBERLAIN:

He said, sire—

KING:

What, the Queen?

Last farcical and pitiful invention
To play his mummary out with. Idle sir,
Will you pursue your drollery to the end?
Have you no drug, no novel incantation
To play a change with?

OLD SCHOLAR: I have said my word.

SECOND TRAVELLER: Dismiss this fool, sire.

KING: Shall we play it out?

There's all the morning to be travelled through
And nought to do it in. We'll fetch the Queen
If this impostor will be satisfied.
She lies in the pavilion by the lake
And does not rise until the day's more up.

He goes to the window

SECOND TRAVELLER (*to the CHAMBERLAIN*): You
guessed! You too!

CHAMBERLAIN (*to the SECOND TRAVELLER*): I
would not think of it,

But now it's on us.

SECOND TRAVELLER: What shall we do now?

CHAMBERLAIN: Blow blindly on like gnats before
a storm.

There's nothing else.

KING: See, still the light is yellow in her windows,
A sallow radiance against the dawn,
That tells of guttering candles. Go to her.

The CHAMBERLAIN bows and goes out

SECOND TRAVELLER (*secretly*): Old man, you can-
not guess what you have said!

Unsay your foolish word and bring him back,
Else equally our happiness is lost

And China ruined. O, a hate begun
Between a king and his succeeding heir
Hath more of evil in it than the plague
That feeds on life.

OLD SCHOLAR: My science is not vain,
As you have vainly said. Let hate begin
And wreck the land and pull the people down!
I have seen five kings on whom the kingdom hung
By a parting thread and still we live in peace.
What is your kingdom? what your government?
I see you from my height of ancient knowledge
Like ants acrawl, as busy and as vain.
Men without learning are even as the ants,
Who heap a mighty commonwealth of dust,
Bridging great rivers, tunnelling great hills
And cutting down enormous blades of grass.
They are purposeless and leave no mark behind.

FIRST TRAVELLER: The Queen is coming, sir, and
still she wears
The silks of yesterday.

SECOND TRAVELLER (*secretly*): True-founded fears!
Now for the storm.

The QUEEN and the CHAMBERLAIN come in

QUEEN: My lord, what must I do?
Long waking has so worn my heavy eyes,
That in this ghostly and uncertain light
I scarce can see.

KING: O, you must touch him, lady.
Learning this most fantastic cure devises
And learning is our master. This old man
Conceives my son to bear a mental wound,
Which nothing but a magic touch may heal

And that touch in the wounding hand resides.
Since by light chance you may have wounded
him—

So learning's logic goes—do me this service:
Go in and touch him.

QUEEN: Is it nothing more
But only this? My hands are yours alone,
Should you desire them severed at the wrists.
Lead me on, chamberlain, where I must go.

The CHAMBERLAIN leads her behind the curtain

OLD SCHOLAR: The Prince himself shall tell me
he is cured;
Send him to me for I have much to do.

He goes out

FIRST TRAVELLER: Now bends she above him, as
a branch of blossoms
At sweet compulsion bends, in a lovely curve.

There is a dead silence

PRINCE (*behind the curtain*): Pull down those
flowers that brush upon my face
And make a garland of them for my head;
The gods are kindly to the garlanded
And love not them that walk with undecked brow.

FIRST TRAVELLER: He wakes! He speaks!
What—

KING: Draw the curtain back!

*The SECOND TRAVELLER throws back the curtain.
The PRINCE is seen, half sitting up, drawing the
QUEEN uncertainly towards him, as though still
in a dream*

PRINCE: Have I been sleeping? All night long I dreamed

That flowers drooped on me and your face among them.

I feel so light, so light, my heart assuaged
That ached and smarted. My limbs feel so free!
Give me your hands again.

KING: My son! My son!

FIRST TRAVELLER: Take her away from him! Ah, this is madness!

My lord, the trance hath worked upon his brain
And his slow-moving and infected blood
Bears along poisonous fancies in its flow.
My lord, it is the sickness still that sways.

SECOND TRAVELLER (*muttering*): You know it is not.

KING: Ah, my son! my son!

QUEEN (*softly, near weeping*): Unclasp his hands and give him cordial:

The quickening liquor shall bring back his wits.
Unclasp his fingers, chamberlain. You see
How tightly they have closed upon my hand
So that I cannot get away from him.
I have done my part now; let the doctors come,
Who shall restore him.

PRINCE (*fully awake*): What am I dreaming now?
What am I clasping? Is it you indeed?
And is all ended that deep-scored my heart,
A hundred harrow-points in every day,
That caught and tore the tender fibres up,
Each time I saw you? Do not leave me now,
I am hardly cured, hardly aware of health,
That yet is entering the open sluices

And that touch in the wounding hand resides.
 Since by light chance you may have wounded
 him—

So learning's logic goes—do me this service:
 Go in and touch him.

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PRINCE (*behind the curtain*): Pull down those
 flowers that brush upon my face
 And make a garland of them for my head;
 The gods are kindly to the garlanded
 And love not them that walk with undecked brow.

FIRST TRAVELLER: He wakes! He speaks!
 What—

KING: Draw the curtain back!

*The SECOND TRAVELLER throws back the curtain.
 The PRINCE is seen, half sitting up, drawing the
 QUEEN uncertainly towards him, as though still
 in a dream*

THE QUEEN OF CHINA

107

PRINCE: Have I been sleeping? All night long
dreamed

That flowers drooped on me and your face among
them.

I feel so light, so light, my heart assuaged
That ached and smarted. My limbs feel so free!
Give me your hands again.

KING: My son! My son!

FIRST TRAVELLER: Take her away from him! Ah,
this is madness!

My lord, the trance hath worked upon his brain
And his slow-moving and infected blood
Bears along poisonous fancies in its flow.

My lord, it is the sickness still that sways.

SECOND TRAVELLER (*muttering*): You know it is
not.

KING: Ah, my son! my son!

QUEEN (*softly, near weeping*): Unclasp his hands
and give him cordial:

The quickening liquor shall bring back his wits.

Unclasp his fingers, chamberlain. You see
How tightly they have closed upon my hand
So that I cannot get away from him.

I have done my part now; let the doctors come,
Who shall restore him.

PRINCE (*fully awake*): What am I dreaming now?
What am I clasping? Is it you indeed?

And is all ended that deep-scored my heart,
A hundred harrow-points in every day,
That caught and tore the tender fibres up,
Each time I saw you? Do not leave me now,
I am hardly cured, hardly aware of health,
That yet is entering the open sluices

And filling up my body.

QUEEN (*struggling*): Let me go!
The King is here.

KING (*to FIRST TRAVELLER*): Give me your hand,
good friend,
And help me from the place. I'll leave them here.
There is another room not far from this,
Where sometimes in the morning I have sat
And counted breaking buds upon the limes.
I can just go so far. I'll lean on you.

PRINCE: O love, my throat and utterance are
choked up,
My heart rejects its business. Speak for me
And tell me of the love between us two,
So long time nourished secretly.

QUEEN (*weeping*): My love!

She goes into his arms

KING: It is done. They see no more of us, no
more.

Our place is not within the bridal-chamber,
Whence ancient men and foolish are shut out.
Take me hence, friends.

FIRST TRAVELLER: Sir, you must speak to them
And cheer them ere you go, lest they imagine
Fain shapes of royal wrath and shameful death,
That kings' wives know of and their paramours.

KING: O, this is hard to do. My son! My son!

PRINCE: Father, are you too here? O, I am
joyful

That you have read my secret and confirmed
By this last seal the happiness you give me.
Is she not fair? I am struck by wonder at her

And cannot speak.

KING: My son, I give you her;
Love her as I do and it is enough.
My queen, a last time you shall be my queen
And sit beside me at the audience,
Which, many years after that I am dead,
Again you'll grace as queen, though then not mine.
Much is to do to-day. The audience
Is packed with business of a weighty sort,
Your marriage first and then the declaration
Of war against the Tartars, which shall be
The last act of my reign. Old Chamberlain,
Send for the general, who counselled me
A war of mighty scope and purposes.
Together we will plan it and together
We'll head the armies. But the marriage first!
Good luck's with us, this is the time of flowers
And flowers shall deck the bridal. Lead, my queen;
Your prince shall follow.

*He takes the QUEEN by the hand and conducts her
to the door. She goes out, while he remains in
the doorway*

KING: For the old, old men,
There's nothing and the young are heirs of all.
O, it is bitter for an ancient man,
Who sees the years dissolve like smoke before him
And nothing through them but the unfriendly
grave,
To know his last delight deserts his side,
His last fool's hope of youthfulness in eld.
Each disappointment that we know in youth
Is wrapped up by the tale of years to spend

And hurts us not, but now the years peel off
 And naked sorrow stands before mine eyes
 Without a hope to hide her ugliness.
 Come with me, friends.

*He leads out the TRAVELLERS and the CHAMBER-
 LAIN. The PRINCE sits up in bed, rubbing his
 eyes. His SERVANT enters*

SERVANT: The bath is ready, sir.
 The waters, wherein pleasant scents do swim,
 Await your body.

PRINCE (*leaping out of bed*): I am coming to it.
 Set out my robes, that there be no delay:
 I feel already what short time's a day.

*They go out in different directions and the stage is
 left empty. A GIRL'S VOICE is heard singing outside*

SONG

The spring will soon be over,
 The withered flowers are falling,
 The crops are growing higher
 And harsh the cuckoo's calling,
 But when the spring is over,
 I still shall have my lover.

For spring is but a season
 And love is a delight
 That knows not age nor waning
 And hath an endless might,
 And when the spring is over
 I still shall have my lover.

The Curtain falls

1915-1917

FEAR IN THE NIGHT

I AM afraid to-night,
We are too glad, too gay,
Our life too sweet, too bright
To last another day.

What hap, what chance can fall,
What sorrow come, what schism,
What loss, what cataclysm
To part us two at all?

The stars with ageless fire
In skies serene the same
Smile down on our desire
And watch our loves aflame.

A whisper soft, a sound,
Unfollowed, unattended,
Shakes all the branches round:
They sleep and it is ended.

You sleep and I alone
Torment myself with fear
For new joys coming near
And gracious actions done.

FEAR IN THE NIGHT

I am afraid to-night,
We are too glad, too gay,
Our life too sweet, too bright
To last another day.

SONNETS ON SEPARATION

I

THE time shall be, old Wisdom says, when you
Shall grow awrinkled and I, indifferent,
Shall no more follow the light steps I knew
Or trace you, finding out the way you went,
By swinging branches and the displaced flowers
Among the thickets. I no more shall stand,
With careful pencil through the adoring hours
Scratching your grace on paper. My still hand
No more shall tremble at the touch of yours
And I'll write no more songs and you'll not sing.
But this is all a lie, for love endures
And we shall closer kiss, remembering
How budding trees turned barren in the sun
Through this long week, whereof one day's now
done.

II

The time is all so short. One week is much
To be without your deep and peaceful eyes,
Your soft and all-contenting cheek, the touch
Of well-caressing hands. O, were we wise
We would not love too strongly, would not bind
Life into life so inextricably,
That the dumb body suffers with the mind
In a sad partnership this agony.

For death will come and swallow up us two,
 You there, I here, and we shall lie apart,
 Out of the houses and the woods we knew.
 Then, in the lonely grave, my dust-choked heart
 Out of the dust will raise, if it can speak,
 A threnody for this lost, lovely week.

III

Is there no prophylactic against love?
 Can I with drugs not dull the ache one night?
 The rain is heavy and the low clouds move
 Over the empty home of our delight
 And find me in it weeping. You are far
 And you are now asleep. The night's so thick,
 Not even one stooping and compassionate star
 Shines on us both parted. O, be quick,
 Torturing days and heavy, turn your hours
 To minutes, melt yourselves into one day!
 . . . The cold rain falls in swift assailing showers,
 Darkness is round me and light far away.
 I'm in our well-known room and you're shut in
 By strange unfriendly walls I've never seen.

IV

Lovers that drug themselves for ecstasy
 Seek love too closely in an overdose,
 When the sweet spasm turns to agony
 And the quick limbs are still and the eyes
 close.
 I too, a fool, desired—to make love strong—
 Absence and parting, but the measure's brimmed,

'The dose is over-poured, the time's too long
 Already, though two nights have hardly dimmed
 My lonely eyes with the elusive sleep.
 O, I'll remember, I'll not wish again
 To go with ardent limbs into this deep
 Sea of dejection, this dull flood of pain:
 We'll love our safer loves upon the shore
 And quest for inexperienced joys no more.

v

Through the closed curtains comes the early sun,
 First a pale finger, preluding the hand.
 Outside more certainly the day's begun,
 Where bright and brighter still the chestnuts
 stand,
 Broad candles lighting up at the first fire.
 I stir and turn in my uneasy sleep
 But in my sorrow sleep's my whole desire.
 About the still room small glints move and creep
 Silently, stealthily on wall and chair,
 Till to strong rays and shining lights they grow,
 Which with their magic change the waiting air
 And all its sleeping motes to gold and throw
 A golden radiance on your empty bed,
 Which wakes me with vain likeness to your head.

vi

To-morrow I shall see you come again
 Between the pale trees, through the sullen gate,
 Out of the dark and secret house of pain
 Where lie the unhappy and unfortunate.

To-morrow you will live with me and love me,
 Spring will go on again, I'll see the flowers
 And little things, ridiculous things, shall move me
 To smiles or tears or verse. The world is ours
 To-morrow. Open heaths, tall trees, great skies,
 With massive clouds that fly and come again,
 Sweet-smelling fields, and rivers and the rise
 And fall of swelling land from the swift train
 We'll see together, knowing that all this
 Is one great room wherein we two may kiss.

VII

We're at the world's top now. The hills around
 Stand proud in order with the valleys deep,
 The hills with pastures drest, with tall trees
 crowned,
 And the low valleys dipt in sunny sleep.
 A sound brims all the country up, a noise
 Of wheels upon the road and labouring bees
 And trodden heather, mixing with the voice
 Of small lost winds that die among the trees.
 And we are prone beneath the flooding sun,
 So drenched, so soaked in the unceasing light,
 That colours, sounds and your close presence are
 one,
 A texture woven up of all delight,
 Whose shining threads my hands may not undo,
 Yet one thread runs the whole bright garment
 through.

THE COMRADES

THE men that marched and sang with me
Are most of them in Flanders now:
I lie abed and hear the wind
Blow softly through the budding bough.

And they are scattered far and wide
In this or that brave regiment;
From trench to trench across the mud
They go the way that others went.

They run with deadly bayonet
Or lie and take their careful aim,
And theirs it is to learn of death,
And theirs the joy and theirs the fame.

IN TRAINING

THE wind is cold and heavy
And storms are in the sky:
Our path across the heather
Goes higher and more high.

To right, the town we came from,
To left, blue hills and sea:
The wind is growing colder
And shivering are we.

We drag with stiffening fingers
Our rifles up the hill.
The path is steep and tangled
But leads to Flanders still.

THE OLD SOLDIERS

WE come from dock and shipyard, we come from
car and train,
We come from foreign countries to slope our arms
again
And, forming fours by numbers or turning to the
right,
We're learning all our drill again and 'tis a pretty
sight.

Our names are all unspoken, our regiments for-
gotten,
For some of us were pretty bad and some of us
were rotten
And some will misremember what once they learnt
with pain
And hit a bloody serjeant and go to clink again.

GOING IN TO DINNER

BEAT the knife on the plate and the fork on the can,
For we're going in to dinner, so make all the noise
you can,

Up and down the officer wanders, looking blue,
Sing a song to cheer him up, he wants his dinner
too.

March into the village-school, make the tables
rattle

Like a dozen dam' machine guns in the bloody
battle,

Use your forks for drum-sticks, use your plates
for drums,

Make a most infernal clatter, here the dinner
comes!

ON TREK

UNDER a gray dawn, timidly breaking,
Through the little village the men are waking,
Easing their stiff limbs and rubbing their eyes;
From my misted window I watch the sun rise.
In the middle of the village a fountain stands,
Round it the men sit, washing their red hands.
Slowly the light grows, we call the roll over,
Bring the laggards stumbling from their warm
 cover,
Slowly the company gathers all together
And the men and the officer look shyly at the
 weather.
By the left, quick march! Off the column goes.
All through the village all the windows uncloze:
At every window stands a child, early waking,
To see what road the company is taking.

LEAVING THE BILLET

Good luck, good health, good temper, these,
A very hive of honey bees
To make and store up happiness,
Should wait upon you without cease,
If I'd the power to call them down
Into this stuffy little town,
Where the dull air in sticky wreaths
Afflicts a man each time he breathes.
But since I have no power to call
Benevolent spirits down at all,
I'll wish you all the good I know
And close the chapter up and go.

THE FAREWELL

FAREWELL to rising early, now comes the lying late,
And long on the parade-ground my company shall
wait

Before I come to join it on mornings cold and dark
And no more shall I lead it across the rimy park.

The men shall still manœuvre in sunshine and in
rain

And still they'll make the blunders I shall not
check again;

They'll march upon the highway in weather foul
and fair

And talk and sing with laughter and I shall not be
there.

ON ACCOUNT OF ILL-HEALTH

You go, brave friends, and I am cast to stay behind,
To read with frowning eyes and discontented mind
The shining history that you are gone to make,
To sleep with working brain, to dream and to awake
Into another day of most ignoble peace,
To drowse, to read, to smoke, to pray that war may cease.
The spring is coming on, and with the spring you go
In countries where strange scents on the April breezes blow;
You'll see the primroses marched down into the mud,
You'll see the hawthorn-tree wear crimson flowers of blood
And I shall walk about, as I did walk of old,
Where the laburnum trails its chains of useless gold,
I'll break a branch of may, I'll pick a violet
And see the new-born flowers that soldiers must forget,
I'll love, I'll laugh, I'll dream and write undying songs
But with your regiment my marching soul belongs.

Men that have marched with me and men that I
have led
Shall know and feel the things that I have only
read,
Shall know what thing it is to sleep beneath the
skies
And to expect their death what time the sun shall
rise.
Men that have marched with me shall march to
peace again,
Bringing for plunder home glad memories of pain,
Of toils endured and done, of terrors quite brought
under,
And all the world shall be their plaything and their
wonder.
Then in that new-born world, unfriendly and
estranged,
I shall be quite alone, I shall be left unchanged.

THE DEAD POET

WHEN I grow old they'll come to me and say:
Did you then know him in that distant day?
Did you speak with him, touch his hand, observe
The proud eyes' fire, soft voice and light lips'
curve?

And I shall answer: This man was my friend:
Call to my memory, add, improve, amend
And count up all the meetings that we had
And note his good and touch upon his bad.

When I grow older and more garrulous,
I shall discourse on the dead poet thus:
I said to him . . . he answered thus to me. . . .
He dined with me one night in Trinity. . . .
I supped with him in King's. . . . Ah, pitiful
The twisted memories of an ancient fool
Beside the silence of a young man dead!
Now far in Scyros sleeps that golden head,
Unchanged, serene, for ever young and strong,
Lifted above the chances that belong
To us who live, for he shall not grow old
And only of his youth there shall be told
Magical stories, true and wondrous tales,
As of a god whose virtue never fails,
Whose limbs shall never waste, eyes never fall,
And whose clear brain shall not be dimmed at all.

THE POOL

Out of that noise and hurry of large life
The river flings me in an idle pool:
The waters still go on with stir and strife
And sunlit eddies, and the beautiful
Tall trees lean down upon the mighty flow,
Reflected in the movement. Beauty there
Waxes more beautiful, the moments grow
Thicker and keener in that lovely air
Above the river. Here small sticks and straws
Come now to harbour, gather, lie and rot,
Out of cross-currents and the water's flaws
In this unmoving death, where joy is not,
Where war's a shade again, ambition rotten
And bitter hopes and fears alike forgotten.

THE HOLIDAY

THE world's great ways uncloseth
Through little wooded hills:
An air that stirs and stills
Dies sighing where it rose
Or flies to sigh again

In elms, whose stately rows
Receive the summer rain,
And clouds, clouds, clouds go by,
A drifting cavalry,
In squadrons that disperse

And troops that reassemble
And now they pass and now
Their glittering wealth disburse

On tufted grass atremble
And lately leafing bough.
Thus through the shining day
We'll love or pass away
Light hours in golden sleep,

With clos'd half-sentient eyes
And lids the light comes through,
As sheep and flowers do

Who no mad toils devise,
While shining insects creep
About us where we lie
Beneath a pleasant sky,

In fields no trouble fills,
Whence, as the traveller goes,
The world's great ways unclose
Through little wooded hills.

A NEW SONG ABOUT THE SEA

FROM Amberley to Storrington,
From Storrington to Amberley,
From Amberley to Washington
You cannot see or smell the sea.

But why the devil should you wish
To see the home of silly fish?

Since I prefer the earth and air,
The fish may wallow in the sea
And live the life that they prefer,
If they will leave the land to me,
So wish for each what he may wish,
The earth for me, the sea for fish.

FOR REMEMBRANCE

LET us remember how we came
To Fletching in the trees,
Where stood the high and misty down
Between us and the seas.

Let us remember how we crossed
Ouse, Adur, Arun, three
Slight rivers rolling in their broad
Green valleys to the sea.

Let us remember most of all
When this bright air no more
We breathe, what young and morning oaths
On the high hills we swore.

THE FIELDS ARE FULL

THE fields are full of summer still
And breathe again upon the air
From brown dry side of hedge and hill
More sweetness than the sense can bear.

So some old couple, who in youth
With love were filled and over-full,
And loved with strength and loved with truth,
In heavy age are beautiful.

THE IDYLL

THIS is the valley where we linger now,
Cut up by narrow brooks and rich and green
And shaded sweetly by the waving bough
About the trench where floats the soft serene
Arun with waters running low and low
Through banks where lately still the tide has
been;
Here is our resting-place, you walk with me
And watch the light die out in Amberley.

The light that dies is soft and flooding still,
Shed from the broad expanse of all the skies
And brimming up the space from hill to hill,
Where yet the sheep in their sweet exercise,
Roaming the meadows, crop and find their fill
And to each other speak with moaning cries;
We, on the hill-side standing, rest and see
The light die out from stream and grass and tree.

To-day we walked upon the lonely downs
And through the still heat of the heavy day
Heard the vague medley of low drifting sounds
And through the matted brambles plucked our
way
Or lightly sauntered over freer grounds
Musing, or with rich blackberries made delay,

Where feed such fruit on the rich air, until
We struck like falling stars from Bignor Hill.

Down the vast slope, by chalky roads and steep,
With trees and bushes hidden here and there,
By circling turns into the valley deep
We came and left behind the hill-top air
For this cool village where to-night we sleep,
A country meal, a country bed to share,
With sleepy kisses and contented dreams
Over the land of still and narrow streams.

The light is ebbing in the dusky sky,
The valley-floor is in the shadow. Hark!
With rushing and mysterious noises fly
The bats already, looking for the dark
With blinking still and unaccustomed eye.
Now over Rackham Mount a steady spark
Burns, rising slowly in the rising night,
Pledging us peace and promising delight.

Now from the east the wheeling shade appears
And softly night into the valley falls,
Soft on the meadows drop her happy tears,
Softly a darkness on the crumbled walls.
Now in the dusk the village disappears,
Men's talk is hushed there and the children's
calls,
While night in passage swallows up the land
And in the shadow your hand seeks my hand.

Only the glimmering stars in heaven lie
And unseen trees with rustling still betray

How all the valley lives invisibly,
Where dim sweet odours, remnants of the day,
Float from the sleeping flowers to please and die,
Borne up by roaming airs, that drift away
Beyond our hearing, vagabond and light,
To visit the cool meadows of the night.

PASTORAL

Who are those lying naked on the hill
Whom the low hawthorn shelters from the sun?
—A shepherd and his nymph, at kissing still
And making love, though spring is nearly done.
He kissed her first when spring was just begun
And forest trees awake with pleasant sound,
When from the creeping plants long trailers run
Across the clearings, broidering the ground
And shedding faint, delicious odours all around.

His sheep forgetting, on his way he came,
His shepherd's crook swung idly at his side:
He hung his head and blushed with tender
 shame,
Soft air provoked his blood as yet untried.
When sudden through the branches he espied
Clothed in wild flesh the wildness of the spring
That beckoned him and fled. He turned aside
And saw her shining shoulder vanishing
And left the path in haste to seek so fair a thing.

He followed on a root-entangled road,
Through sighing saplings, under blossomed
 trees,
By hollow trunks whose murmurs faint forebode
The labour and the anger of the bees.

Still he essayed her flying form to seize,
That still escaped the clutching of his hand,
And followed on the flashing of white knees,
Till in an open glade she came to stand.
He caught at her, they fell, far from the pasture
land.

The fauns had played with her by night and day
And kissed her, lip and breast and flank and eye,
And Pan had sought her bed one night to stay
An hour or two until the moon was high.
She knew the forest's starlit revelry
But he was nurtured in a village low
Where men are born and breathe and eat and die
By consecrated rote and do not know
How headier than the grape's love's dizzying wine
can flow.

They loved in youth and joy and kindliness
In hill-side hollows hidden out of sight
And forest alleys which the quick months dress
In changing colours for unchanged delight.
She seeks him in his orchard trees at night
And there they lie till dawn on fallen flowers,
He on her mouth and rosy breast and white
Limbs gladly spending all his youthful powers,
While the faint stars mark on the ever-marching
hours.

And summer now will part them. He will turn
To find a mortal and a slighter love,
A village girl, whom seeing, he will burn
To share her rushen bed with thatch above.

Not long alone in woods the nymph will rove,
Searching and sighing for the faithless boy
To whom a month or twain her pleasure clove,
But all the emblems of their love destroy
And seek the dear companions of her former joy.

THE PURSUIT OF DAPHNE

DAPHNE is running, running through the grass,

The long stalks whip her ankles as she goes.

I saw the nymph, the god, I saw them pass

And how a mounting flush of tender rose

Invaded the white bosom of the lass

And reached her shoulders, conquering their
snows.

He wasted all his breath, imploring still:

They passed behind the shadow of the hill.

The mad course goes across the silent plain,

Their flying footsteps make a path of sound

Through all the sleeping country. Now with pain

She runs across a stretch of stony ground

That wounds her soft-palmed feet and now again

She hastens through a wood where flowers
abound,

Which for her healing give their trodden heads

And staunch her cuts with balsam where she treads.

Her sisters, from their coverts unbetrayed,

Look out in fright and see the two go by,

Each unrelenting, and reflect dismayed

How fear and anguish glisten in her eye.

By them unhelped goes on the fleeting maid

Whose breath is coming short in agony:

Hard at her heels pursues the golden boy,
 She flies in fear of him, she flies from joy.

His arrows scattered on the country-side,
 His shining bow deserted, he pursues
 Through hindering woodlands, over meadows
 wide,

And now no longer as he runs he sues
 But breathing deep and set and eager-eyed.

His flashing feet disperse the morning dew,
 His hands most roughly put the boughs away,
 That cross and cling and join and make delay.

Across small shining brooks and rills they leap
 And now she fords the waters of a stream;
 Her hot knees plunge into the hollows deep
 And cool, where ancient trout in quiet dream;
 The silver minnows, wakened from their sleep
 In sunny shallows, round her ankles gleam;
 She scrambles up the grassy bank and on,
 Though courage and quick breath are nearly done.

Now in the dusky spinneys round the field,
 The fauns set up a joyous mimicry,
 Pursuing of light nymphs, who lightly yield,
 Or startle the young dryad from her tree
 And shout with joy to see her limbs revealed
 And give her grace and bid her swiftly flee:
 The hunt is up, pursuer and pursued
 Run, double, twist, evade, turn, grasp, elude.

The woodlands are alive with chase and cry,
 Escape and triumph. Still the nymph in vain,

With heaving breast in lovely agony
And wide and shining eyes that show her pain,
Leads on the god and now she knows him nigh
And sees before her the unsheltered plain.
His hot hand touches her white side and she
Takes the green-blooded safety of the tree.

There is an end of dance and mocking tune,
Of laughter and bright love among the leaves.
The sky is overcast, the afternoon
Is dull and heavy for a god who grieves.
The woods are quiet and the oak-tree soon
The ruffled dryad in her trunk receives.
Cold grow the sunburnt bodies and the white:
The nymphs and fauns will lie alone to-night.

SHADOWS

UNDER the leaves of that tremendous oak,
Where the low stars lie tangled, there is shade
Delusive and the leafy hedges fade
Into the darkness like a curling smoke.

O, in the shadow there,
Come with me, love, there let us two repair
To mingle with the darkness and be lost,
As somewhere viewless ghost with viewless ghost
May meet, caress and shiver with sweet pain,
Invisibly enamoured. So may we
Lie in each other's arms invisibly
And touch and see not, kiss and kiss again
With lips obscure,
That find their way as ardent and as sure
In darkness as in day.

Come! there the softly moving shadows
And wrap all vision up for dim delight,
And soothe the straining eyes with oil
That charms the senses, sends all sound
And knows for its anointed how to keep
A magic darkness, an enchanted hush,
Close in the shade of the uncertain

Still the low stars shall waver overh
And low clouds hang upon the mi

A softer darkness on our love to shed,
Where we embrace and kiss invisibly
 But tangibly,
And keener still, all senses being gone,
Save only one bright sense—save touch alone.

INVITATION

O GIRL with honey-coloured hair,
And will you come and dance with me?
The night is dark but you can spare
Light from your eyes for both to see,
And in the shade of trees divine
Like a whirled torch your hair will shine.

So dance apart and dance away;
The rest about the lanterns gather,
But there is light for two to play
In any place where we're together,
And there is soft long grass and shadow
Beneath the rick across the meadow.

For love in darkness is at ease
And likes no candle save the light
Of kindled eyes and glowing tress
And bodies luminous with delight.
The rest about the candles stay:
O, dance away! O, come away!

THE DEBT

WHEN I am dead and you gather up my poems,
Put them all in, all those that speak of you,
Those that glanced at you in sundry disguises,
Ariadne, Daphne and the nameless nymph,
The flower-bright queen who ruled a king in
China,

And the country-girl that early lost her love.
Bind up with them the frank and honest sonnets,
The open songs, the unashamed odes,
That spoke straight to you and told that I loved
you,

Described your beauty or called you by name.
These are not ours; for what I took of beauty
Belongs to our fellows for whom I write.
The traces I have left on hill-top and valley
Were made of the world and belong to the
world;

But more than half of the loveliness I captured
Was yours at first and now is the world's.
Our first hidden kisses and unskilled embraces
And the fierier love whereto we attained
Are lines on the chart whereby dreaming lovers
Shall steer their hearts till the end of the world.
When we are dead and our ashes are scattered,
Let them say of us: She was and he wrote.

WASTE

So rich a treasure in yourself you bring,
That some is spilt and wasted on the way,
As low clouds, halting, on wild seas astray,
Cheat the thick, thirsty blossoms of the spring.
And some I waste. But in our later years
We shall remember how, too prodigal,
We let the precious drops of honey fall,
And pay for them at last with useless tears.
Ah, waste, waste, waste! However much there is,
There's not too much for bare and mortal days,
That now, receding in youth's golden haze,
Seem dim but ever full eternities.
But there's an end! Take heed, lest you and I
Have wasted wealth to think on when we die.

THE STORM

WE wake to hear the storm come down,
Sudden on roof and pane;
The thunder's loud and the hasty wind
Hurries the beating rain.

The rain slackens, the wind blows gently,
The gust grows gentle and stills,
And the thunder, like a breaking stick,
Stumbles about the hills.

The drops still hang on leaf and thorn,
The downs stand up more green;
The sun comes out again in power
And the sky is washed and clean.

THE HALT

"MARK time in front! Rear fours cover! Company—halt!

Order arms! Stand at—ease! Stand easy." A sudden hush:

And then the talk began with a mighty rush—
"You weren't ever in step—The sergeant—It wasn't my fault—

Well, the Lord be praised at least for a ten minutes' halt."

We sat on a gate and watched them easing and shifting;

Out of the distance a faint, keen breath came drifting

From the sea behind the hills, and the hedges were salt.

Where do you halt now? Under what hedge do you lie?

Where the tall poplars are fringing the white French roads?

And smoke I have not seen discolours the foreign sky?

Is the company resting there as we rested together,
Stamping its feet and readjusting its loads

And looking with wary eyes at the drooping weather?

THE EMPTY HOUSE

I

WE walked all morning over furze and grass,
And climbed steep tufted heights against the sun,
Went down the shaven tracks, where rabbits pass,
And unalarmed the scuttling pheasants run.
There were no men in sight, save at a farm,
Where, far below, we saw about midday,
Two ploughmen lying lapped about with warm
Rank growings of the hedge. Green buds of may
Hung over them unopened, primroses
Were yellow round their bodies. On we went,
Up a long slope through tangled coppices,
Where half-fledged hazels on the pathway leant,
Till suddenly we saw through thinning boughs
The chimneys of an old long-lonely house.

II

The door was gone, the jambs aslant, awry,
The roof grown over with the mosses slow,
The windows stared with blank and empty eye,
Half the panes gone. The flagstones grinned below
In gaping cracks. The foolish cattle came
About the orchard, where the unpruned trees

Held to the sky white boughs of trembling flame,
And long wild grasses brushed about our knees.
The dumb house called to us, the black, wide door
Stood open for us long and stood in vain :
Sighing we guessed those old walls held a store
Of rest for us when we should come again
Into the hollow, long and green and still—
Then turned away to cross the further hill.

CONTINUITY

Long after we have ceased to be
The sun will light in bush and tree
And shine unchanged; the high turf hill
Shall stand up in beauty still,
And all the valleys that we knew
Put on again the summer's hue,
When we are gone, when we are gone,
And are what green things feed upon.

THE WILD GOOSE CHASE

How long a day through thickets and over stones
And over broad red furrows fresh from the
plough,

And hills where low the wind-bent heather drones
And swift airs whistle round the sky-line bough!
How the wind clutched at flesh and bowels and
bones!

How breathless they were all day, how weary
now,

When in the town beneath a fading light
They sought a lodging for their transient night.

What in what frenzy did they thus pursue?

Eternal wisdom or the baser gold
Or pleasures of the senses ever new
Or rarer spiritual ecstasies still untold?
From dawn till dusk, with sun, wind, hills, rain,
dew,

They were burnt or they were weary or they
were cold

Or wet or dirty. Still they chased untired
A thing not known but endlessly desired.

But when the chase was done at last, they came
Into the darkling town with empty hands;
Their faces through the dusk burnt with a flame

Wind caught, their feet were heavy from marshy
lands.

They brought with them no answer to their proud
claim,

No prize given over to their loud demands;
They found an inn, where windows long and low
Streaked the thick darkness with a golden glow.

Inns of our nights, where we have sat together,
Boots off and dreaming at the magic fire!

There the mind's free, the spirit casts its tether
The thoughts in concert dance and do not tire,

Till sleep with silent foot and sudden feather
Brushes his drugs across the joy and desire,

And all night long is darkness and deep peace,
In the old inn, walled round with silent trees.

The happy good find this when the day is spent,
When they have filled their day with seeing and
knowing.

Here from their chase they came and found con-
tent

And reaped at night good grain of early sowing,
Laughter by tears and joy by sorrow lent

And gifts on unexpected breezes blowing—
We too shall sit, after youth's fret and rage,
In the comfortable bar of middle age.

Yet while light burns and the air aches in our veins
And we are capable of anger and love,
Slow fires of the senses, swift play of the brains
And tenderness and friendliness enough,

156 THE WILD GOOSE CHASE

We will be out in the winds, the dews, the rains,
 And find our meaning in such transient stuff,
While through sharp, veering gusts of tears and
 mirth
We chase our wild geese over the windy earth.

WHO KNOWS HOW BEAUTY SPRINGS

Who knows how beauty springs
Out of the world of things,
To take the eyes with sudden flame
And vanish whence it came,
High above things that vex,
Fear, covetousness, spite and sex?

Lost in the busy day
In thoughts that harry and press,
I knew a young girl passed
And heard her swinging dress;
And when I turned I saw,
Raised on a stair,
Only her ankle, finely poised
Against the coloured air.

Who that has known can tell
How in this world of things,
Suddenly in the dark day,
Eternal beauty springs?

SONG

As I lay in the early sun,
Stretched in the grass, I thought upon
My true love, my dear love,
Who has my heart for ever, '
Who is my happiness when we meet,
My sorrow when we sever.
She is all fire when I do burn,
Gentle when I moody turn,
Brave when I am sad and heavy
And all laughter when I am merry.
And so I lay and dreamed and dreamed,
And so the day wheeled on,
While all the birds with thoughts like mine
Were singing to the sun.

THE RETURN

I

Now into hearts long empty of the sun
The morning comes again with golden light
And all the shades of the half-dusk are done
And all the crevices are suddenly bright.
So gradually had love lain down to sleep,
We knew it not; but when we saw his head
Pillowed and sunken in a trance so deep
We whispered shuddering that he was dead.
Then you like Psyche took the light and leant
Over the monster lying in his place,
Daring, despairing, trembling as you bent . . .
But love raised up his new-awakening face
And into our hearts long empty of the sun
We felt the sky-distilled bright liquor run.

II

When love comes back that went in mist and cloud
He comes triumphant in his pomp and power;
Voices that muttered long are glad and loud
To mark the sweetness of the sudden hour.
How could we live so long in that half-light?
That opiate shadow, where the deadened nerves
So soon forget how hills and winds are bright,
That drugged and sleepy dusk, that only serves

With false shades to conceal the emptiness
Of hearts whence love has stolen unawares,
Where creeping doubts and dumb, dull sorrows
 press
And weariness with blind eyes gapes and stares.
This was our state, but now a happy song
Rings through our inner sunlight all day long.

III

When that I lay in a mute agony,
I nothing saw nor heard nor felt nor thought;
The inner self, the quintessential me,
In that blind hour beyond all sense was brought
Hard against pain. I had no body, no mind,
Nought but the point that suffers joy or loss,
No eyes in sudden blackness to be blind,
No brain for swift regrets to run across.
But when you touched me, when your hot tears
 fell,
The point that had been nothing else but pain
Changed into rapture by a miracle,
In which all raptures known before were vain.
Thus loss which bared the utmost shivering nerve
For joy's precursor in the heart did serve.

THE COMPLAINTS

To H. C. Harwood

I

WELL, I am tired at last! I put away
Languor and lassitude and all regrets.
Better, I said, the dull but solid day
Than an endless reckoning of hopeless debts,
Unheard complaints, unanswered prayers, unseen
Genuflexions to an unbeliever-in God.
But I am not so dull as I have been;
Too long this long and lightless way I have trod
And suddenly now I see what thing I tread,
Lit by a transient flash of the lightning brain,
That leaps in the sky an instant and is dead
But, having shown, needs not to come again.
Ridiculous treadmill! that the sorry fool
Thinks is the road to joy, his brain is so dull.

II

You, to whom Heaven gave all the gifts I need,
Money and leisure, long I followed you
And made the lightest line you wrote my creed
And gave you the extravagant praise I thought
was due.

I'd sneer at you now, to pay my less lucky case,
For sneering is easy from the poor to the rich,
Throw witty songs in your cold and happy face
And ease on your books the beggar's endless
itch.

But still from your heaven of unmoved success,
You cast your gifts to me for my delight,
You from your wealth to me in wretchedness,
And every gift of yours in my eyes is bright.
Strange power, strange happiness, strange poetry!
That even envy cannot twist awry.

III

There are many countries that I have not seen,
And many kinds of men I have not met,
But all the gracious towns where I have been
Haunt in my brain and whisper there and set
Strange echoes going with their lovely names,
Birdlip and Paris, Fontainebleau and Wells,
Places that live in me like happy dreams
And sound in the present day like distant bells.
Here I am set and there's no end, no end;
Too soon the vision closes, too long remains,
Like the last long talk one had with a lost friend,
Whose memory lingers on, when friendship wanes.
Better to stay at home! The towns one sees
Trammel the day with stupid memories.

IV

I was a soldier once. How fear was then
Mixed with bright honour and delightful pride!

How different we were from other men,
Who lived in houses and in houses died!
How huge the morning was, before the sun
Sullenly found us marching in the mist!
And sleep was dark and deep when work was
done

And food awoke in us a greedy zest.
But all that's over. I no more shall see,
Quick to the word and ready to my hand,
The smooth and easy moving company
Marching in column on the heathery land.
There's no pride now and fear's the fear that's
bred

Of money and suchlike maggots in the head.

v

I sat once in the curved arm of a tree
Over the salty marsh, above the wide
And misty mere, half river and half sea,
Where faint low hills marked out the further
side.

Then time passed over as I bade it go,
Fast when in joy my hurrying heart beat fast,
And when sweet rest inhabited me, so slow
I did not know if a day or an hour had passed.
Thus I retarded or advanced the day,
That subject and sweet minion of my will,
But now with stubborn beats the hours go their
way

Like clouds in a steady wind and new hours still
Loom up behind them and heavily go by
In the same swift and daunting *monotony*.

VI

I am sick of devices and of policies,
Of the restless nerves, of the itches, aches and
 strains,
And the tiresome long pursuit that balances
My sluggish brain against their stupid brains.
O, under beauty's whip I still can run
And match my pace against another's pace;
I only ask a little air and the sun
Falling in warmth upon my upward face.
But these dull rains of weather and the mind
Shut the world from me in a sombre veil
And memories of old weariness lie behind
And hours to be, ill-nourished, clammy, pale,
Lie on my forward journey and fill the way,
As the dull day fades into a new dull day.

VII

When in the mines of dark and silent thought
Sometimes I delve, and find strange fancies there,
With heavy labour to the surface brought
That lie and mock me in the brighter air,
Poor ores from starvèd lodes of poverty,
Unfit for working or to be refined,
That in the darkness cheat the miner's eye,
I turn away from that base cave, the mind.
Yet had I but the power to crush the stone
There are strange metals hid in flakes therein,
Each flake a spark sole-hidden and alone,
That only cunning toilsome chemists win.
All this I know and yet my chemistry
Fails and the pregnant treasures useless lie.

VIII

The well-made sonnet takes the summer sea
Proud in her beauty as a halcyon,
Her timbers chosen words, and melody
Filling her sails of rhyme. She passes on
In majesty and calm, but this I write
Is like a crazy and a leaky boat,
Which, with its planks not cut or caulked aright,
Can hardly on the troubled waters float.
Now comes an arrogant great wave ahead
That swamps the blunted bow and spumes along;
Into the storm I drift in doubt and dread,
Patient, not brave, enduring but not strong.
I know not on this huge and angry sea
How far my wretched ship can carry me.

MEDITATION IN JUNE, 1917

I

How can we reason still, how look afar,
Who, these three years now, are
Drifting, poor flotsam hugely heaved and hurled
In the birthday of a world,
Upon the waves of the creative sea?
How gain lucidity
Or even keep the faith wherewith at first
We met the storm that burst,
The singing hope of revolution's prime?
For in that noble time
We saw the petty world dissolve away
And fade into a day
Where dwelt new spirits of a better growth,
Unchecked by spite and sloth.
We saw, and even now we seem to see,
In fitful revery,
Like hills obscured and hid by earthly mist,
The hopes that first we kissed:
We see them, catch at them and lose again
In apathy and pain
What maybe was (though it once seemed ours to
hold)
No more than fairy gold.

II

We pity those whom quick death overtakes,
Though they will never see
How hope dissolves and founded loyalty shakes
Traitorously, piteously.
They lose at most and death is voiceless still
Nor whispers in their ears
When they are lying on the deep-scarred hill
What our calm silence hears.
They lose all various life, they lose the day,
The clouds, the winds, the rain,
The blossoms down a deep-banked road astray
They will not see again;
Great is their loss but more tremendous things
To us at home are given,
Doubts, fears and greeds and shameful waver-
ings
That hide the blood-red heaven.
They knew no doubt and fear was soon put
by:
Freely their souls could move
In deeds that gave new life to loyalty,
A sharper edge to love.
They are the conquerors, the happy dead,
Who gave their lives away,
And now amid the trenches where they bled,
Forgetful of the day,
Deaf, blind and unaware, sleep on and on,
Nor open eyes to weep,
Know nought of what is ended or what begun
But only and always sleep.

III

We said on that first day, we said and swore
 That self should be no more,
 That we were risen, that we would wholly be
 For love and liberty;
 And in the exhilaration of that oath
 We cast off spite and sloth
 And laboured for an hour, till we began,
 Man after piteous man,
 To lose the splendour, to forget the dream
 And leave our noble theme,
 To find again our lusts and villainies
 And seek a baser prize;
 This we have done and what is left undone
 Cries out beneath the sun.
 How glad a dawn fades thus in foggy night,
 Where not a star shines bright!

IV

Is all then gone? That nobler morning mood
 When pain appeared an honour and grief a
 gift
 And what was difficult was also good?
 Are all our wishes on the waves adrift?
 The young, the eager-hearted, they are gone,
 And we, the stay-at-homes, are tired and old,
 Careless how carelessly our work is done,
 Forgetful how that morning rose in gold
 When all our hearts cried out in unison,
 Triumphant in the new triumphal sun.
 How dull a night succeeds! how dark and cold!

MEDITATION IN JUNE, 1917 169

We will arise. Oh, not as then with singing,
But silence in our mouths and no word said,
Though wracks of that lost glory round us clinging
Shame us with broken oaths we swore the dead,
But steadfast in humility we rise,
Hoping no glory, having merited none,
Through the long night to toil with aching eyes
And pray that our humbler hearts may earn the sun.

THE FLOWERING TREES

THE wandering year from day to day discloses
First lenten lilies, then midsummer roses,
And ends at last in sombre fantasy,
About the season of the stripping tree,
With asters and dark daisies and the strange
Chrysanthemums. And so from change to change
The shimmering months proceed in shifting
dresses

And strew the meadows and the wildernesses,
For there in grass the daffodils are born
And the wild rose-buds hanging on the thorn.
All these are good, but this perplexes me,
That blossom holds not longer on the tree,
For in the morning the tall pear stands white
With fragile petals that are shed at night,
And the apple wears her trembling sweet array
For hardly longer than a short spring day.
Would they might further live or would that I
Might see three springs without a break go by!

LADY GODIVA

(A third version)

If the truth were but known, when she came at last
To the bower's low door and the journey was past,
Godiva slid from her palfrey and said:
Only one with a curious eye in his head?

For why had she gone with not even a shift
Through the still grey streets, where her hair's
 gold drift
On shoulder and breast and side made one
With the bright veil cast on her by the sun?

O surely it had been braver, and sweet,
To have lavished her beauty along the street,
To have ridden in the eyes and the smiles of the
 crowd
And to have heard their praises, muttered or loud.

For else her ride was only a ride,
Nothing done, nothing given, nothing beside,
No shame, no sacrifice made, no pain,
But a fresh, cool journey and home again.

She frowned as she stood up bare in her bower,
White as a pearl and fresh as a flower,
Then smiled as she thought that there had been one
And that Peeping Tom was better than none.

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ON HOLMBURY HILL

THE narrow paths branch every way up here
And cross and tangle and are nowhere clear
And the empty sky, swept clean by a rainy breath,
Smiles on our tortuous scramblings underneath.
But here's the top, for round a sudden bend
We stumble breathless on the unlooked-for end
And stare across the misty weald. Below
The lonely trains through the wide country go,
Each with its plume of steam. And westward, see,
Past the far shoulder streams tumultuously
A black and driven storm across the air
And casts about the downs its troubled hair.
Thick at the middle, at the edges thinned,
Heeling over like a ship before the wind,
It eats the weald up with a greedy mouth.
Still, twenty miles or further to the south,
Dimly and grandly Chanctonbury stands
A moment clear above the blotted lands.
It's gone. But still the blue and empty sky
Smiles on over our heads unwittingly.

ELEGY

(For J. N., died of wounds, October, 1916)

So you are dead. We lived three months together,
But in these years how absence can divide!
We did not meet again. I wonder whether
You thought of me at all before you died.

There in that whirl of unaccustomed faces,
Strange, friendless, ill, I found in you a friend
And then at last in these divided places
You there in France, I here—and this the end.

For friendship's memory was short and faithless
And time went by that would not come again,
And you are dead of wounds and I am scatheless
Save as my heart has sorrowed for my slain.

I wonder whether you were long in dying,
Where, in what trench, and under what dim
star,
With drawn face on the clayey bottom lying,
While still the untiring guns cried out afar.

I might have been with you, I might have seen you
Reel to the shot with blank and staring eye,
I might have held you up . . . I might have been you
And lain instead of you where now you lie.

Here in our quietude strange fancy presses,
Dark thoughts of woe upon the empty brain,
And fills the streets and the pleasant wildernesses
With forms of death and ugly shapes of pain.

You are long dead. A year is nearly over,
But still your voice leaps out again amid
The tangled memories that lie and cover
With countless trails what then we said and did.

And still in waking dreams I sit and ponder
Pleasures that were and, as my working brain
Deeper in revery will stray and wander,
I think that I shall meet with you again

And make my plans and half arrange the meeting,
And half think out the words that will be said
After the first brief, careless pleasant greeting. . . .
Then suddenly I remember you are dead.

THE WISH

WOULD that I were away now
From the iron streets and the steel sky,
For filthy are these streets in rain
And hard and dusty dry.
Harshly the 'buses clang their way,
The people are ugly that go by;
They hurry and their mouths are hard
And they are hard of heart and eye.

I stand on the station every day
To catch the crowded, swaying train
But if I only look down the line
I turn away in sudden pain,
For an elm stands at the curve of the rail
That beckons me out, out again,
Whether its leaves flash in the sun
Or the bare boughs drip with rain.

The frost has my small town now
And the street is iron there too,
For it stands in a high cup of the hills,
Right in the north wind's view;
But the steel sky is beautiful there
And the people that hurry there are few
And the bare hedges that catch the sun
Tremble with frosty dew.

THE WISH

Though it be cold, I wish I were there
To see slow winter move
And the elms growing green again
And the blackthorn that I love.
Though spring's late there, it comes at last
In the meadow and the thin beech-grove,
And happy I might lie there in May
With a long green bough above.

SEARCHLIGHTS

(In the manner of Paul Fort)

O SEARCHLIGHTS, pierce the nights with swords
and drive the stars in ruin thence; the moon in cold
indifference looks down upon your leaping hordes.

Storm the old ramparts of the sky and shake the
planets all awry, pull, if you can, the young moon
down upon the house-tops of the town.

The rosy sky adrowsing lay but now the night's
alive with fire, new pulses in the veins of night,
quick phantoms of a fiercer fire.

Then fly, bright clouds, across the air and meet
and interchange and merge and flood the sky with
flame, submerge the planets in your ghostly glare.

O not with swords you now invade the ancient
kingdom of the stars but armed with soft and
fluent blades you break black heaven's tremendous
bars

And seize those pale and stately lights that move
and move invisibly and whirl them up and down
the sky, your followers, your satellites!

And while across the night you fling your blue
and brilliant garlanding, even the cold indifferent
moon moves gaily to a soundless tune;

And all the shades that used to lie still in the
silent streets and sleep, rise up and move fan-
tastically in time with you and leap and leap!

BALLAD

HE

O, WHERE are you, my own true love,
And why are you not here?
The nightingale amid the boughs
Is flattering his dear.

The night among the empty fields
Lies like a child at rest,
But empty, empty are my arms,
And light, too light my breast.

SHE

If you had known what I have known,
The harsh word and the blow,
The sour meal and the heavy task,
You would not chide me so.

O, I go on through all the day,
And only hope at night,
That I may slip out silently
Without a sup or bite,

That I may find you in the dark,
Wherein you will not see
The angry red that rims my eyes
And burns them bitterly.

You have not felt what I have felt;
This only you have known
That it is sweet to walk with me
In the dark fields alone.

You only hear me speak of love
And you have never heard
My father's thin and grumbling voice,
My mother's heavy word.

Yet, ah, the most I know of you
Is nothing more than this
That when the painful day is done
Your lips are good to kiss.

THE KING'S DANCER

To Charles Winzer

It was the King of the East, they say, who bought
A slave girl in the market of Bagdad;
The merchants brought her thither, travelling
A long way southward, from the wrinkled hills
Of Georgia and sold her for a price.
It was the king who saw her, as he passed
At midday through the hot and narrow streets,
And asked what sum they set on her. They told
him.

He bade his purse-bearer count out the coins
And bring her home. But when he saw her first
Among the fountains and the misty leaves
In the cool garden of his golden house,
He loved her.

She would dance for his delight
And when she entertained him thus, he stared,
Stupid with pleasure. She was young and nimble,
With subtly moving wrists of ivory
And ankles finer and stronger than graven steel.
She was the blossoming bough that stirs in spring,
The pearl-white clouds that drift across blue
heaven,

The rainbowed wave that dies in colour on
A sunny shore, the wheeling flight of birds

Hardly descried against a dusky wood,
The arrowy darting fish in quiet brooks;
All the earth's myriad movements lay in her.
The king sat in his jewelled seat and saw
With deep, fixed eyes her motions flash and blend
In convolutions of the astounding dance,
And ever when she paused he signed her on,
Silently staring.

She danced all through the night,
Now in slow measure mimed the rising moon,
And now in a frenzy of light and hurrying steps
The scattered and stricken clouds that fly in shreds
Across the face of the moon and are lost in night
And die in bitter space for love of the moon.
Still with his grave deep eyes the king applauded,
Silently nodding, and when she paused for rest,
He raised his great arm up and with hairy fingers
Urged her to dancing. Dark lines beneath her
eyes

And sharp lines at the corners of her mouth
Grew as night grew and weariness invaded
Even her limbs of pearl and steel. She wept
Small and infrequent tears of pain, hard wrung
From a brave heart and body. Still she danced
And when dawn shot his blood-red flames across
The shimmering fountain and drowned the garden
in gold,
She sank in a last, triumphant attitude,
Her bosom open to the rising sun.

So the king loved her and he built for her
A bright pavilion hidden in high trees
And there at night he came to visit her,

Without his retinue. Two Nubian soldiers
Alone attended him to ward away
The attempts of the wicked, and remained on
guard

While he was in. So when his pleasure bade,
He came to her and watched her maddening dance
Or took her on his knees and fondled her
And praised her lovely body of pearl and steel
With silent glances and silent straying hands,
Her body that was, so often as she danced,
A flickering flame, an insubstantial wreath
Of linked movements.

But he came one night
Through the black shadows of the mighty trees,
Black and immense beneath the risen moon,
Unseen, unheard. The negroes crept behind,
Blotted in shade. He picked his way to the gate
And through the filigree of coiled gold
He saw her little garden full of light,
Wherein she danced alone and not for him,
But with her moonwhite arms to the risen moon
She offered her beauty and her sacred steps.
An hour he stood unmoving; an hour she moved
In measures of unbelievable loveliness,
A phantasy of night, the essential wraith
Of the moon, as though the light that filled the
garden

Were thicker at the centre and there took
A bodily shape and grew to be a woman,
That danced and danced for silence and the moon.

But when the light was gone, he turned away
And sought his negroes in the deeper shadow.

They came to him, darkness in darkness disguised;
He drew them close and spoke in a low still voice,
And, pointing with his hand to the pavilion,
Commanded: Let the woman's ankles be broken.

HYMN TO DESIRE

For Linda Chesterman

Not only when thou art terrible, Desire,
Do we acknowledge thine unshaken power;
Thou liv'st not only in the raging fire,
Thou liv'st as fully in the slightest flower.
Now the moon fails, that radiant so long
Rode the black, burnished levels of the night,
Serene and lovely witness of delight;
And now I catch my breath and hold my song,
That cannot longer than the heaven be bright,
For the faint clouds that now obscure the moon
Darken my mind's serenity too soon.

Thus is it ever. Still the shade will creep
On lovely things, who knoweth how or whence?
Like quick dreams crowding in a healthy sleep,
A sudden pulse, an urgent influence.
Thus the light wrinkles on an azure pool
Spread outward from the fall of one frail leaf,
The first the tree weeps off for future grief,
In the sad hour when summer's cup is full.
Long move the waters, though the touch be
brief,
And break in shards that image of the sky
They showed before in blue tranquillity.

Who knoweth how or whence desire will come,
The wind that wakes the foam-line on the sea,
That breathes new feeling into spirits numb
To try again an exquisite agony?
Maybe when in the idle world of men,
We poise in words upon the perfect hour
Or, lonely, stoop to touch a lonely flower,
At the serenest point of noon or when
A black cloud breaks into a silver shower;
Out of all these and out of more than these
The influence comes that shatters all our ease.

I too have prayed to feel desire no more,
To find in little things a small content,
No longer from the green and friendly shore
To swim, a waif in the huge element.
My spirit darkens, my heart beats fitfully;
A power descends upon my soul that shakes
The calm of tranquillising song and breaks
The doom-dark wave of passion over me
And every tumult in my being wakes;
A power not friendly to me but divine
Troubles the current of my trembling line.

In all the things we love the ambush lies
And most of all in love. Who has not known
Under the glance of the beloved's eyes
How painfully his deep unrest has grown?
Out of sweet things we would a refuge make,
A certain harbour for the flying mind,
Each worldly solace to our fortune bind,
Comfort from love, counsel from friendship take;
Yet in the roof and furnishings we find

HYMN TO DESIRE

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Hid like a snake, whose fangs bear venomous fire,
Thou hast thy secret shelter made, Desire!

O most of all in love! Contentment there
Is but the single moment ere decay,
Precursor of a long and dull despair,
Frets the fruit's golden rind and flesh away.
Some wear love's flower a day and see love go,
Having been content; but they whose loves
endure

Ache with an ill love has not strength to cure,
Strive for perfection, stumble still and know
Too well that love is ever insecure,
That in the midst of pleasure hunger sits
And feeds upon the tortured heart and wits.

Immortal agony! what canst thou be,
If that thou be not the immortal spur
Which, when we halt in sloth or luxury,
We faint and failing mortals must incur?
Thus comes the wind upon a mountain-lake
That lay beneath the sun, serene and bland;
And now at touch of the triumphant hand
A thousand colours on the surface wake;
The ripples move and curl from land to land
And, while they struggle and the tyrant blows,
The tumult of the sunlit water grows.

The faint clouds drift and drive across the moon,
Veil and unveil her distant loveliness;
The ecstasy will sink and leave me soon,
Yet still the vague, bright intimations press

Remorselessly upon my flagging mind,
And to these whips my shuddering flesh lies
bare

And to these lights my aching eyeballs stare—
I wince, my courage leaves me, I am blind!

O spare me utter death, but mostly spare
The dull revengeful fire, the mocking prize
Which in the heart of all fulfilment lies.

For all fulfilment let lament be made,
Save for the pause and turning which is death;
Weep for those spirits who on shows that fade
And earthly copies waste their fitful breath,
Forgetful of the far, ideal skies.

They know not how the awakened soul can be
Borne above sorrow and felicity
To hold brief converse thus with Paradise
And catch the signals of eternity;
They know not that desire is but a spray
Thrown from the fountain of eternal day!

The moon is gone, the moon is down and dead;
A last dull gleam in the horizon trees
Bears witness to the glory that is shed;
Now through the vacant sky a rambling breeze
Murmurs invisibly. The wings now fail
That bore aloft my struggling load of song.
I faint, I falter. Be thou now not long,
O sleep unwaked of owl or nightingale,
Nor let not in on me the urgent throng
Of dreams, but be thou full and calm and deep,
For more than this I crave not, blessed sleep!

A DIALOGUE

LONG have I striven and now am overwrought
With sleepless nights and days whose blackened
 suns
Make pale my blood and drain my spirit of fire,
Mine eyes of light

—But spring will come again.

—But not again that old ideal spring,
The essence of the Aprils that have been
And live as memories. All that is lost;
Now, even in my six and twentieth year,
Like winter twilight in a little room,
Over the wide expanse of wood and field,
Slow darkness thickens in the room of the world,
Which with the lamps of science and poetry
I must illuminate as best I can.

—But there is life beyond this darkening life.
Somewhere behind the narrow arch of blue
Dwell the imaginable verities
Which you have seen and whose remembered

forces

Draw your sick heart in longing from your breast.

—They are there indeed but I am cast on earth.
After how long and how headlong a fall
I here reside! where there is nothing true
But shadows and faint copies that suggest
Dimly and brokenly the real world,

Whence we are exiled here. O, how can I
See the truth shine beyond phantasmal shows
And thin the splendour of the gorgeous earth,
And still be glad for either?

—But your spirit
Remembers yet the home from which you came
And gives ideal beauty to the fragments
And wreckage of this unpieced, fantastic life.
—Would it were so! The world in which we live
Was once my pleasure. Midday gleaming elms
And silent oaks with brooding night in their
boughs

And the low-chanting aspens and the holy
Unreal thorn ablaze with silver flowers,
Whether amid the odorous meadows set
Or on the sides of smooth and lofty hills,
Delighted me and then were nought but trees.
The rayless blue of heavy August skies
Pleased me, and the clouds that floated stiffly past
Were solid toys that vision touched and played
with.

I found my joy in beautiful forms and in
The fresh and supple body of my young love,
Her voice, her eyes, her arms about my neck,
And in all girls that passed me in the streets,
Light with the grace of youth and happy pride,
In colours and music and the lovely words
That then could bind my sorrows up with spells,
Such sorrows as then I knew. But now through
these

Shines the intolerable sum of truth,
Gleams through the misty veil
Of the word's beauty and makes poor and thin

This life's imperfect grace.

—Yet do you not

Strive for perfection still,
Strain and glow warm in straining for the truth?
Are not the joys you had from earthly things
Transformed by musing on the original?
—Would it were so!

—Yet have you no inner faith

That from the mist of delusion you will at length
Emerge and move about the real world?

—Thence have I fallen far and farther fall
Headlong in ruin through these empty cheats.
Why should I hope (since hope is also a cheat)
Ever to find again that tangled way
I followed hither from eternity?

Still through the waste of dark and whirling time,
Through shadowed years and sombre centuries,
My spirit goes, like a lost child in a wood,
Crying for home amid the unfriendly boughs
And straying further from the invisible road.

COLD

THE hard snow lies upon the hard round hills;
Unbroken silence fills
The empty valleys, and the unmoving air
Is thickened by the cold. The northward plain
Under a haze lies bleak and brown and bare,
Untouched by snow, and, at its westerly rim,
Loom dark and dim
The Malverns on the mist like a huge stain.

Turn, turn again
From that wet country to the snowy hills,
Where coldly in its silence the frost fills
The deep and rounded valleys with a fine
Jewel of air made crystalline.
The cold has frozen the air, the air's a gem,
Bright as a diamond filled with frozen light,
From the hill-tops down to the plain's wet hem,
Hard, yet clear to the sight.
Move not—we cannot move, we are prisoners,
Like that old traveller whom a later found
Within a shining ice-block straitly bound,
Staring immovably two hundred years
Across the waste, white ground.

MID-WINTER

WINTER hems us round;
A powder of dry snow lies lightly on the ground;
The cold stings our flesh and our hearts, perhaps,
as well;
Every faintest sound
Jars the quiet air like a harshly shaken bell.

The turning of the year
Was done a week ago, yet no light doth appear
And still the long nights eat the comfort-giving
day.
Warmth draws not near;
Not long enough to hearten us the sun doth stay.

Gentle, gentle sun,
Be our friend as of old for one day, only one.
Breathe deceitful life into us and everything,
Before happiness is done,
The happiness we need for the long months till
spring.

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THE FIRELESS TOWN

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BENEATH a rising wood there was a town
That had in ancient times its own renown,
For in a valley rich and warm it lay
And there through interwoven boughs the day
Came softly stealing and burning brighter, till
The broad sun rose above the topmost hill.
A long way west, the broad and level plains,
White with the dew or filled with morning rains,
Stirred in the dawn and shook a myriad leaves
Over the flanks of silky-coated beeves,
And there great fields of green or yellow corn
With lifting heads the seasons did adorn,
While acres much more odorous lay between,
Bee-pleasing clover and the scented bean,
And orchards, where long loaded boughs hung
down,
Parted the open country and the town.
It was a portly place, because therein
A many merchants mighty gain did win
By bartering the farmers' rich increase,
Or wool much wealthier than the Golden Fleece,
Wherewith they built great halls of yellow stone
And set tall windowed gables thereupon
And hoarded in their houses gold and gem
... and silver vessels. One of them

In beauty blest and maiden innocencies.
Her name was Helen and her heart was proud,
For though much loved she had not loved nor
 bowed
To be a toy of any man or hear
Love's subtle offers urged by any whisperer.
Yet in the flesh she was divinely made;
Her honey-shining hair in heavy braid
Clung round her temples, as the sunset lies
On snowy mountain ridges, and her eyes
Burnt like the heaven's warm and candid gray
When August spends in fire his dreamy day;
Straight as an arrow, as a birch-tree tall,
Where maidens met she overcame them all.
So she was made; but how she looked and moved
Could not be told by them that most her loved.
They watched her with the young girls, when she
 came
And danced with them, a light and errant flame,
Cool fire that flickered and was not consumed
But burnt more radiant as the dark trees gloomed
With drooping night. They worshipped her when
 she
Advanced her narrow ankles delicately
Or turned on flashing heels or quickly span
Around the ring with light skirts swaying as she
 ran.
When she was walking, it was strange how went
Her nimble pace upon the pavèment,
How easily she climbed the steepest hill
And laughed upon the crest, untroubled still;
She spoke as though a nightingale had rested
Within her rising bosom and there nested,

Contented with one climate all the year,
Where every morning still gay summer did appear.
In many suitors found she lovers none:
Of all that prayed to her she chose not one.
At nightfall by the lantern light she stayed
While her companions of the sun delayed
With other friends to saunter in the wood
So softly that the light awakened brood
Of crying birds that harboured there slept on
Nor knew what hid, delightful things were done,
What gifts refused and what at last were given,
Beneath the friendly, close and leaf-embroidered
heaven.

Some maidens came back silently and some
Loud in their joy along the dark streets home
And some came weeping; but ere all were come
Helen slept dreamless in her narrow bed,
Her body lying straight, her quiet head
Still on the pillow and her quiet eyes
Peacefully rid of day's quick vanities.
Though all men praised, her father praised her
more

Because he slept at night with unlocked door,
Unshuttered windows and a heart at rest,
While all his fellows at the inn confessed
That bars and bolts must keep their daughters in
And roving dishonour from the anxious kin.
Young men reviled what gave him quiet blood;
Pale were their sullen faces; who had stood
All night beneath her window, that all night
Denied the least reply of flattering light,
Grated no sound, however harsh or small,
But blindly stared and answered not at all.

They lingered in the dark and Helen lay
Unmoved in careless sleep until the day
Despatched them hollow-eyed and unappeased
away;

She rose alone, even as alone they slept,
Nor knew what thankless vigil had been kept.
Proud was the fortress, strong the citadel,
Jealous the girl and kept her treasure well,
But thorniest flowers are pulled and even the
fortress fell.

At that time in the town the custom was
Early on May Day through the gate to pass,
Maidens and youths in amity together,
To go upon the hill-side and to gather
Dew-heavy may and what else flowers might be
Hidden in brakes or flaunting on the tree.
With these they hung the houses and the day
Was spent in country feasting and in play,
Hiding and Seeking, Kissing in a Ring,
Here is a Thing and a Very Pretty Thing,
Or Who's Your True Love Now? And when they
played

At suchlike pastimes, every holdback maid
Blushed but grew kinder and grew rosy warm
And sighing leaned upon her lover's arm;
All but the proudest beauty must relent
And yield herself in fee of that day's merriment.
But the expected hour, which all the year
Lit Helen's lovers like a beacon clear,
Found her so chilly yet that she went out
Unpartnered in the happy pairing rout
Or kept a girl on either side of her,

Or mixed so gaily in the march and stir
That none of the young men could find a place
To be sole gazer on her laughing face,
To speak aside with her in trembling tones
Or dare for love what only love condones,
The lawless hand's caress or wanton speeches,
Wherewith the suitor claims what he beseeches.
They went out singing through the portal wide
And past the runnel at the meadow-side,
The mill-wheel's clean and bubbling freshet, where
Long water-weeds hung out their trailing hair,
Past the deep mill-pool, green and dark and still,
That threw them back their pictures, past the mill
And up the lane, where first the climb began
And down the chalky ruts clear gushes ran.
Now by the roadside came the shining water,
Now went from hedge to hedge with muffled
 laughter
And spread across the path and stopped the way;
Then there was mocking and assumed dismay,
And lifted skirts and fearful steps, and some
Were borne across but Helen would not come
A gift to any helping arm. She leapt
As lightly over as the young men stepped,
Standing a moment poised upon the edge.
Have you not seen, upon the grassy ledge
Beside a pool, a slender lily swaying
At every turn of wind and each obeying,
As though in mind to leap it? Thus she stood
Under the first green shadows of the wood.

But now through scattered trees and luminous
 shade

Of lighter leaves they saw the open glade
Upon the hill-top, where light harebells grew
Flecking the open turf with airy blue.
The troop dispersed and running up and down
Broke boughs and gathered flowers to hang the
town;

These in their baskets garnered violets new
And fresh anemones that sparkle through
The wood's light shade and glimmer in green air,
Those threaded daisies or on darkest hair
Laid garlands of the azure bells that fade
And still refuse to be light trophies made
Or grace a dwelling or exist an hour
On maiden bosoms sweeter than the flower,
But sink in death away and cheat the stronger
power.

Now Helen laid smooth hands upon a branch
That broke and hid her in an avalanche
Of trembling green and red. She tossed away
To waiting lads the mute and captive spray
And went where blossoms of the starry white
Nodding in careless liberty upright
Presumed to mock upon the neighbouring red
That still they lifted an unconquered head.
These made her helpless prisoners, soon she went
Deep to the knees in the green wonderment
That bordered all the wood and there she found
In folds and hollows of the broken ground
By lustrous settlements and colonies
The misty milkmaids and sunny primroses;
All these she plucked and could not have enough
But filled her skirts with bales of shining stuff.
However long and willingly they toiled,

Yet would these treasures not have been despoiled,
Though they had harvested till odorous night
And sought for shutting blooms by glow-worm
light;

But now the sun, well risen in the sky,
Shone on the osier baskets trembling high
And bade them homeward. So they took the way,
Mindful what yet was due of mirth and play;
And as they travelled happy songs were sung,
Maidens and men in company, all young,
All that brave youth together, all the young!

How excellent is youth and April blood,
That is by every diverse fancy wooed
And moves as easily and merrily
As April breezes in a hawthorn-tree!
How good youth found that day to love devoted,
Well in his calendar with red marks noted,
A stage of time, a milestone in the year,
Whereby nought sad or evil came anear
But only careless joy and joyous things,
Events of mark and golden happenings!
Yet in the town was one with whom the day
Unnoticed and unhonoured burnt away,
Who lay so deep in dusty dreams and care
He had not known that May's first dawn was there.
Young Michael, for his woe, inherited
Strange figured folios from his father dead,
That set him seeking for a dismal truth
And cast a shadow early on his youth;
For though not thirty of his years were done
He lived and worked and ate and slept alone,
Renouncing every sweet companionship

And every bond of heart and hand and lip
For those uncouth and more than doubtful spells,
Whereof he sought to tame the obstinate syllables.
Long he would sit with painful, swimming eyes
On herbals and black-letter mysteries,
Or drowse himself in black and sleepy smoke
From crystal crucibles, whence he awoke
With aching forehead and with trembling limbs,
Searching the lore that swelled the unholy
seraphims.

Outside his window grew a little tree
That was not propped or pruned but, blossoming
free,

Knocked all that morning on the dusty pane
Its dear beseeching flowers to him in vain.
He saw it not and even smelt it not
But plunged in thornier thickets of dark thought
Pursued in heat through mental bog and briar
A phantom quarry, a Jack o' Lantern fire,
Soiling in those foul roads his youthful spirit
To gain a doubtful prize of little merit.
When noon with burning hand was come and gone
And lower stooped and lower the unhasting sun
In regular departure and the day
Fruitless for him had almost passed away,
Slant through his window came a radiance
That flickered on his books in careless dance,
Dazzling his eyes and teaching novel lust
For pastime to the gray and learned dust.
He laid aside the worm-worn manuscript,
Whence bitter honey painfully he sipped,
Marking his place with blackened finger. Still!
What music ranted from the distant hill

And moved the valley air to murmur sweet,
Breathing unwonted perfume in the street,
As though a golden light a golden sound should
meet

And marry their vibrations in the air,
Nor light nor sound, but like the lucky pair,
Salmacis and her lover, joined to grow more fair!
That music filled his heart with new unease;
Gazing he saw amid the lower trees
With unbelieving eyes a happy throng,
That ran downhill in exultation strong,
Holding aloft great branches of the may
And casting countless blossoms by the way.
Still as he gazed they grew; no more they seemed
Fantastic shapes at drowsy midnight dreamed
But breathing flesh of mortal excellence
And bodies to be seized by human sense.
Michael awoke; the new blood in his veins
Roused, like the gush of early summer rains,
A thirsty channel into busy growth
Till blossoming joy took root in obscure sloth
And green and burgeoning desires arose,
Sweet as the rose and thornier than the rose!
A day will come in studious life, when he
Who pawns youth's heritage for the rusty key
To chambers full of learning's grimy treasure
Pauses and longs to know a cleaner pleasure;
So Michael found in half a moment's time
That all his empty years were out of rhyme
With his green age, and widowed of delight
His tedious day and single pillowed night.
Then in a trance he stood and wondering
Heard nearer to his house again the maidens sing,

Whereat his senses started and he knew
What to his five and twenty years was due
That yet was never paid. He cast adown
Book, crucible and tattered magic gown
And ran into the street with eyes aflame
As on their road the May Day revellers came,
Flushed with the spoil and treasure of the year
And crowned and garlanded with scented gear.
They checked their onward course and stared at
him,

Being so light and gay and he so grim;
He seemed with inky hands and matted curls
A gnarled tree in a field of flowerlike girls,
A shaggy comet in a starry night,
So blazed his eyes and so his hair upright
Circled his head with dark and waving flame
So dusky red he grew in diffidence and shame.
They swirled in stream about, but Helen stayed
Under his glance, erect and unafraid,
And seeing her, he thought that he could see
His fortune in her bright proximity,
All kindliness and innocence and truth
And all the comeliness of living youth.
She laughed at him: O Michael—for your name
I know, and something of your dusty fame—
Will you come with us till the day be spent?
But hearing her so light and insolent,
He felt a strange unrest, a foolish fire
Light in his heart's tough wood and rise and twine,
Flickering in the tempest of his blood
But burning still the hard and stubborn wood,
Till longing made a fury of sparks and heat
That blinded him and, swaying on his feet,

He kissed her mouth and broke in panic away
With eyes of fear and breathing of dismay.
She panted too; the rest were silent, till
A girl behind sent up a mocking trill
Of thin clear laughter and all their laughter broke,
Louder and louder. He woke and Helen woke;
He was dying back from frenzy and she stood
Whitefaced in anger but with troubled blood;
He stammered, she said nought. Then at the last
The youths behind were eager to be past
And pushed their careless way by Michael's house,
Leaving him staring and inglorious,
Forgetful of the studies that had been
So long his spirit's solely loved demesne,
His precious drops and powders and the fume
That still with hard, stale odour filled his room.
Therein he now amazed in drowsy fit
Sought to bring back to hand his wayward wit,
That journeyed in a new and cloudier clime,
As though by drugs translated, whither time
Will years upon the perfect minute stay
Or cram a coloured lifetime in a day.
Long there he sat in revery and long
Sought to forget he had heard any song,
So all might be as erst, but found the charm too
strong.

Meanwhile the gay, vociferous multitude
Awoke the town with clamorous prelude;
Joy's drums in all the ardent voices rolled
And echoed deafening from the houses cold;
The tall and silent elm-trees on the green,
That edged the street, bowed loftily their serene

Great heads, and yews in gardens walled around
Shook stiffly but responsive to the sound.
Then all the houses woke and doors were thrown
Wide open, that the music might be blown
Through the low rooms and cool wide passages
To leave behind a sweet and subtle trace
In faint-flowered curtains and old padded chairs
And, lingering at the dark turn of the stairs
Where children falter going up to bed,
Endure with homely scent to ease their dread.
The town took back its youth again, as though
A golden river on gray sand should flow
And drew them here and there and parcelled out
In house and church and hall the laden rout
To strew their gifts. And now the happy night
Drew near to them already, vaguely bright,
With longed-for victories and promised joys,
That morning pledged amid the sun and noise,
In darkness and in silence to be fulfilled,
When the lanterns paled and the loud pipes were
stilled.

But Helen was not with them. In her room,
Close curtains drawn, she brooded in the gloom
That could alone her angry roses hide
Or the white blossoms of her shaken pride,
And where unheard she could both sigh and weep,
Thinking by this to lull her shame to sleep.
But all in vain, since she could not forget
What had been seen of all, the kiss that yet
Burnt on her pallid mouth and printed there
A stain that weeping could not all outwear.
So from her sighing she at last arose:

Again upon her cheeks the insulted rose
Burst into strange and sudden blossoming,
And now her anger spread a rapid wing.
This is the tale of smutchèd innocence,
That, whatsoe'er the injury or whence,
She half detects a felon in her breast,
And deems her enemy the fault hath guessed
And so, twice angered and with double fire,
Rebukes in him her own, her traitorous desire.
Her lamp, being lit, gave her no comfort new,
But shone too clearly out and sent all through
The shadows of her small and quiet room
A tempered radiance and a golden gloom
That, falling on her fingers, let her see
How, clenched and tight, they trembled piteously.
Ask not how she, being gentle and so young,
Could in her virgin thoughts have that among
Which now she fostered to a bitter fruit,
For shame in honest minds is oft the root
Of evil things. Who knows what storms they are
That blot out suddenly the sailor's star
Of peace to his own soul? They rise unbidden
From distant seas and icy mountains hidden
Far off in lands untraversed. Reason then
Drives blindly on till calm returns again,
Nor guesses whither but despairingly
Gives up the rudder to the tyrant sea
And shuddering hears the hard-tried timbers
start

In that fine ship she navigates—the heart.
So, anger being master, Helen took
The yellow flyleaf of an ancient book
And wrote in haste what words she had to write,

Nor would not read them through but quickly
doused the light,
And ran with panting bosom down the stair
To find unseen her chosen messenger.
She sent him off and fled in haste again
To hide from all her mingled fear and pain
And to determine, if much brooding might,
What end should come at last to that eventful
night.

A garden underneath her window lay
That in the cool and breathless end of day
Sent up sharp perfumes climbing to her sill
To take the shadowy air by waves and fill
Her room with ghosts of flowers. The lane below
Lay empty, but the town was louder now
With silver quiring and with wanton cries,
That ever in a maddening strain would rise,
Clearer and stronger, till the troubled air
Streamed in a turmoil and the lights aglare
Laid out before the gust their long and tossing hair.
All this she heard and saw, and she could see
Her young companions go by two and three
Across the lane's dark entry, where the grass
Grew in the flags, whereat a faint: Alas!
Rose in her bosom, neither willed nor owned,
But still by hotter spite to be atoned.
And yet the lane below unvisited
Lay silent till the quick, triumphant tread
Of Michael sounded there, whose happy eyes
Looked upward in assured lover's guise.
For him her messenger had found alone,
Drowsing in dulness, by his black hearthstone,
And given him her letter, which, being read,

Set the swift blood aspinning in his head.
Then he had risen and with care had dressed,
And niceness, that the beating heart confessed,
And gone to keep the tryst, as fine as one
Could be who never yet on love's wild ways had
run.

He passed amid the gay and careless crowd,
As little noticed as a midnight cloud,
And heard no syllable of all their song
That shook the dusky trees and died in long
Reverberations down the alleys deep
Where workday tools forgotten lay asleep;
He passed the lighted windows where the old
Amused the night with stories manifold
And bragging legends of their days of gold;
He passed young daring girls, who mocked him
after

And loosed light arrows from the bow of laughter;
He passed them in a lonely happiness
And turned into the dark lane's quiet recess.
Then Helen waiting saw him come, and set
A candle in her window. Through the wet
And odorous hedge, he ran towards the sign,
Coming out wreathed with tangled trail and vine,
Convolvulus and creeping briony,
And stood before her garlanded. But she
Leant down to him and whispered through the still
Sharp-scented air that lay upon her sill
A word of honeyed consequence, wherein
His name afloat, like flowers in heady wine
Enchanted him to stammering and threw
His sense unguarded from the level true.
How shall I come to you, sweet love? he cried.

But she with finger on her lip replied:
Hush! for the night is young and all awake,
And none must know how we our secret pleasure
take.

What should I do if any found you here?
You are too loud a lover. O, I fear
Lest in your eagerness you should proclaim
To all at once your triumph and my shame;
In silence take what secretly is given,
Nor shout your victory to the listening heaven,
But breathe it on my breast and I shall hear
What could not be so sweet cried in the loud mob's
ear.

How shall I come to you, he cried again,
Softer, since love in him did love restrain,
Whereto she answered: You shall say, not I;
Can wizards not by incantation fly
Astride a slip of thorn? But in despair
He raised his wild arms up and said to her:
My craft avails me not, for I have learnt
No gallant's tricks like these. I never burnt
Till now to climb a maiden's window nor
Studied the cantraps some have made therefor.
What shall I do? Must we the whole night long
Gaze at a distance? Surely I am strong
And I will climb to you or find a way. . . .
He ceased and no word further could he say,
Being by love made dumb and made a fool,
Such as he is who is just escaped from wisdom's
rule.

But while in misery his body shook
Helen adjured him with a merry look
And said she had not brought him there in vain

To see her window and go home again,
And thereupon let down to him a great
Basket, that had through half the year for freight
The wizened winter-apples, packed away
And growing sweeter and fewer every day,
But now must hold a heavier load instead,
A lover going to a lawless bed.
I'll draw you up in this, she breathed; but he
Looked at the height and stood uncertainly
Doubting her strength, until she laughed again:
Love pulls the rope with me and halves the pain,
And night is wasting, Michael, and I have made
An easy pulley for my better aid.
Come, if you truly love me! He thereat
Hastily in the swinging basket sat,
And as she drew he dug his nails between
The wall's great stones a little way to win,
And as she laboured he bore double strain
Till all his muscles ached with twice her pain,
And double agony his heart possessed
To hear the loud breath in her toiling breast
And think that she should stiffen every limb
And tax her blood to give herself to him.

Much ere he came in thoughts that hurried past,
She mused what she must do with him at last,
And in perplexity had put aside
Her many plans for taking down his pride
And still had made no plan; but when he came
So close to her, his eyes revived her shame
And sent new anger running in her breast,
For now his foolish heart, by hope caressed,
Moved him to praise her in a voice that shook

And stare on her with so possessive look
And glance so greedy and assured that he
Burnt up at once her doubtful leniency.
Are you spent, love? he asked her, being aware
That now the basket rocked in middle air,
Tie up the rope and rest. But she replied:
Rest easy, Michael, for the rope is tied
And we are safe together, you and I.
Therewith, into the room's obscurity,
She disappeared and silence settled down
On that one alley in the noisy town.
When she had gone, he lay awhile at ease,
Whispering fondly inward foolishness,
How lovely she was, how made for him to adore
With that young heart which never loved before,
How high a spirit and what a gallant fire
Had leapt impetuous to his desire,
How her mind marched with his against delay
And tumbled all the barriers from the way!
He sighed in the darkness, smiled and was content,
Nor cared at first how long the minutes went
Brushing his face with slow, enchanted wings
And filling his mind with magical new things,
He lay so close to all he coveted
That love cried truce and reason, lightly sped,
Entered upon a new and drowsy reign,
Wherein there was no movement nor no pain,
But honeyed longing that without a smart
Brims up the intricate vessel of the heart,
And promised happiness that lightlier lies
Than rose-petals on the most burning eyes.
Long he lay motionless in such a trance,
But acrid fire began again to advance

And stung him, that he had not heard above
A new beginning of the toils of love
Nor words of joy nor any promises,
Which as the gift itself the unpractised lover
please.

Then in that stillness fear got room to throw
A panic in his heart and check the flow
Of the delighted blood; one dark thought sped
From heart to hands: What if the girl were dead,
Slain by the labour that for love she bore?
Michael leapt up; the basket trembled sore,
Yet sorer shook his limbs, and as he stared,
Darkness replied above and he despaired.

While thus he languished in his bitterness
Behind his back a murmur 'gan to press
From the singing far away, towards the lane,
Strayed echoes of the festival refrain
That louder grew until the very sound
Did from the high and shadowy walls rebound
And wake him from the stupor, so that he
Turning beheld the alley suddenly
Filled with a shouting mob, whose torches flung
Light in the dark air, where amazed he hung,
And in whose web of interwoven noise
He heard first one and then another voice,
That cried his name aloud and bade him climb
The further way nor longer wait on time
But of himself to assure felicity.
Then, at the cawing of that rookery,
Blood filled his splitting brain, his burning eyes
Darkened and swelled, he felt his arteries
Straining and giving and his hands clenched tight

Upon the swaying rope. But still the light
Derisive uproar pleased itself below,
Numbing his brain in his pride's overthrow,
He would have fled them, but he could not flee,
Would have ignored them, yet could not but
see,

Till at the last anger possessed him too
And pride returned and courage from them grew,
And, turning on the crowd, he would have spoken
But by the noise beneath his words were broken,
Thrown high and scattered in the silent night
That lay acalm above the crowd's delight.
Silence! he cried again. His mockers still
Derided him, men loud and women shrill,
But the third time he used such vehemence,
Such thunder in his voice and so immense
A gesture of his spread and threatening hand,
That all grew quieter, as the poplars stand
Whispering between the onslaughts of the storm,
And stared like fools upon his swaying form.
Then in that silence mightily he said:
I will be gentle, though about my head
Your brutal mockeries spin and though I see
The trick the wanton girl has played on me.
I will be gentle. Helen! make an end,
Lest I should do what you can never mend,
Free me and let me down. A quietness fell,
Wherein the trees' low sigh was audible
And nothing else. He heard no sound above,
No sign of her repentance or her love;
The rope hung still and taut. But now beneath,
First came a whisper, then a rising breath,
And lastly uproar, wherein no word was,

But as the wind and wave contend in tongueless
cause.

But that great crying fell as it began;
From group to yelling group a silence ran
And laid a finger on the mouths that cried
Till in low murmurings the tumult died
And Michael spoke again, slow, heavy words,
That floated through the hush like ominous birds.
I have not learnt, he said, the trivial spell
That can a woman's mutinous heart compel.
But I who am weak in dealing with desire
Can yet constrain earth, water, air and fire,
And, for this town hath mocked me and since one
Hath hurt me closer than all your taunts have done,
I make return! Henceforth no fire shall live
Within your houses and the fugitive
Light flame that dances in your lanterns shall
To blackened nothing in an instant fall.
You elements, with whom I dwelt at ease,
Come to my aid, confound mine enemies!
Out, friendly light and warmth! Out, every flame!
Back to the yokeless aether whence ye came!

Thereon a strange and dizzying thing befell
For, quicker than the magic takes to tell,
While still they gaped, they suddenly were aware
How from their torches into the still air
The bright fire slipped and instantly was gone,
Like burning-plumaged coveys, journeying on
From human haunts to fabled Araby.
They gazed about and everywhere could see
The shining casements blackened and gone blind,
And in that lightless waste no man could find

His neighbour or his friend. Then down they
threw

Their useless lanterns and the panic grew;
The weaker cried and wailed with piteous voice
And the dark lane re-echoed with the noise
Of broken men and women, whose dismay
Spared not each other as they fled away
From Michael's wrath and left him hanging there.
And now, with dreadful whisperings, despair
Ran through the town, as erst the darkness ran,
And laid on every house its gloomy ban;
Flint lost its virtue and the friendly flame
Lay in the pebble whence before it came;
There was no moon, the stars were faint and few
And still the dreadful night was hardly half-way
through.

Then in a pitiful agony hurried all
To that dark shadow hanging on the wall
And begged with breaking voices and loud sighs
That he would turn on them compassionate eyes
And give them back again their patron, flame.
They knelt to him and prayed and felt no shame,
And sobbed and stormed at him in unison:
But when their maudlin beggary was done,
He answered coldly: What you now entreat
Cheaply you valued, when you deemed it meet
To mock one greater than your hearts have known.
Suffer together now, as I alone,
And have the heart to be as silent as I,
Lest I should turn on you my mockery.
They answered him: We are humble, we are
broken,

We kneel to you and offer you as token
Our outstretched hands and bended heads and ask
That you will set on us some heavy task
To prove our single heart. But he replied:
Were I to yield, your tears would not be dried,
The dust be hardly scattered from your knees
Ere you would charm away your promises
More easily than I your lanterns quelled.
A deep low groan from all that concourse welled
And sank again in harsh and sullen sound,
Like lost winds on a waste and barren ground.
Dumbly they waited; silently he stood,
Raised as a judge upon that multitude;
Sound slept and time stood still; neither he nor they
Knew how far night had gone along her way
Before he spoke again: O little creatures,
That dare not face the night, without all nature's
Coddling and cherishing and friendliness
But catch affrighted at her swinging dress
For warmth and shelter and as little know
Herself as the dumb beasts that creeping go,
I'll stand no more between you and your nurse;
A little thing shall take away my curse.
When I have ended what is here begun
And my long journey up the wall is done,
And I have taken what is promised me,
Once more in torch and lantern burning free
The gallant flame shall scare this cold inanity!
All shuddered and none spoke; their whispering
Moved in the darkness like a living thing,
A tense and deeply breathing animal
That could through tight and trembling bodies
crawl

And draw existence from their agony.
From no man's throat, and yet from all, a cry
Rose thinly up and offered him his will
With their submission. But he heard them still
With scorn and answered not. And Helen lying
Hid in her chamber mused upon that crying,
How once these maddened men were hers to rule
And each before her stood an equal fool,
Stammered when she spoke and simpered at her
smile

And sought with tedious homage to beguile
Her heart impregnable. She could not hear
Their vows below for cold and sickening fear
That drowned her spirit, yet, in that forlorn
Deep night, a sudden doubtful star was born,
A flickering spark she scarcely could descry
That moved and winked and cheated still her eye,
And yet at last, the more she thought thereon,
With steady and with friendly radiance shone;
For she imagined in that dreadful hour
An iron courage and a golden power
And Michael standing over all the crowd,
Strong as they weak and quiet as they loud.
She saw nought else but this; she did not see
A trembling and a ruffian two or three
That came to draw the too long idle rope
And grin at her from time to time, in hope
Through the thick shade to see her blushing deep
Or hear her praying them or hear her weep.
Her thoughts were what the tree's are, when the
wind
Strips the light petals off and leaves the fruit
behind.

Outside they saw with hot and staring eyes
Slow in the dark the heavy basket rise
And saw a shadow from the shadow climb
And slip into the casement. Tardy time
Stood still again and so immense a hush
Reigned in the town that an uneasy bush
Rubbing its boughs together seemed as though
A mighty storm in mighty trees did blow;
So long the moment was that men believed
Night's cog was slipped or time's old hour-glass
thieved,

That day's sweet advent was for ever past
And that the rolling world was stayed at last.
Then one cried: Look! and all together cried,
For this man in his lantern light had spied
And that had seen a blackened kitchen-fire
Glow faintly into crimson and expire
And glow again. Then in a rush of light
The gabled houses stood out tall and bright,
Lit by a lucid flood that overshone
All that the human eye can gaze upon,
Nor could they lift their lids again to see
Until it sank in peaceful radiancy.
And then a glow ineffably serene,
Sleeping on every torch and wick was seen,
A friendly light, so friendly, that a strange
Beatitude, a soft and melting change,
Soothed the wild heart and filled the uneasy breast
With golden hopes of joy and silver hopes of rest.

FÊTE GALANTE:
THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE

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ARISTONOË, the fading shepherdess,
Gathers the young girls round her in a ring,
Teaching them wisdom of love,
What to say, how to dress,
How frown, how smile,
How suitors to their dancing feet to bring,
How in mere walking to beguile,
What words cunningly said in what a way
Will draw man's busy fancy astray,
All the alphabet, grammar and syntax of love.

The garden smells are sweet,
Daisies spring in the turf under the high-heeled
feet,
Dense, dark banks of laurel grow
Behind the wavering row
Of golden, flaxen, black, brown, auburn heads,
Behind the light and shimmering dresses
Of these unreal, modern shepherdesses;
And gaudy flowers in formal patterned beds
Vary the dim long vistas of the park,
Far as the eye can see,
Till at the forest's edge the ground *grows less*
And the flowers vanish in the *obscurity*.

The young girls gather round her,
Remembering eagerly how their fathers found her
Fresh as a spring-like wind in February,
Subtler in her moving heart than sun-motes that
vary

At every waft of an opening and shutting door;
They gathering chattering near,
Hush, break out in laughter, whisper aside,
Grow silent more and more,
Though she will never chide.
Now through the silence sounds her voice still
clear,
And all give ear.

Like a silver thread through the golden afternoon,
Equally the voice discloses
All that age-old wisdom; like an endless tune
Aristonoë's voice wavers among the roses,
Level and unimpassioned,
Telling them how of nothing love is fashioned,
How it is but a movement of the mind,
Bidding Celia mark
That light skirts fluttering in the wind
Or white flowers stuck in dark,
Glistening hair have fired the dull beholder
Or telling Anais
That faint indifference ere now hath bred a kiss
Denied to flaunted snowy breast or shoulder.

The girls attend,
Each thinking on her friend,
Whether he be real or imaginary,
Whether he be loving or cold,

For each ere she grows old
 Means to pursue her joy and the whole unwary
 Troop of their wishes has this wild quarry in cry,
 That draws them ineluctably,
 More and more as the summer slippeth by.
 And Celia leans aside
 To contemplate her black-silked ankle on the
 grass;
 In remote dreaming pride
 Rosalind recalls the image in her glass.
 Phillis through all her body feels
 How divine energy steals,
 Quiescent power and resting speed,
 Stretches her arms out, feels the warm blood run
 Ready for pursuit, for strife and deed,
 And turns her glowing face up to the sun.
 Phillida smiles
 And lazily trusts her lazy wit,
 A slow arrow that hath often hit;
 Chloe, bemused by many subtle wiles,
 Grows not more dangerous for all of it.
 But opens her red lips, yawning drowsily,
 And shows her small white teeth,
 Dimpling the round chin beneath,
 And stretches, moving her young body deliciously.
 And still the lesson goes on,
 For this is an old story that is never done
 And now the precept is of ribbon and shoe,
 What with linens and silks love finds to do
 And how man's heart is tangled in a string
 Or taken in gauze like a weak and helpless thing.
 Chloe falls asleep; and the long summer day
 Drifts slowly past the girls and the warm roses,

Giving in dreams its hours away.

Now Stella throws her head back and Phillis dis-
poses

Her strong brown hands quietly in her lap
And Rose's slender feet grow restless and tap
The turf to an imaginary tune.

Now all this grace of youthful bodies and faces
Is wrought to a glow by the golden weather of
June;

Now, Love, completing grace of all the graces,
Strong in these hearts thy pure streams rise,
Transmuting what they learn by heavenly al-
chemistries.

Swift from the listeners the spell vanishes,
And through the tinkling, empty words,
True thoughts of true love press,
Flying and wheeling nearer,
As through a sunny sky a flock of birds
Against the throbbing blue grows clearer and
clearer,
So closer come these thoughts and dearer.

Helen rises with a laugh;
Chloe wakes;
All the enchantment scatters off like chaff,
The cord is loosened and the spell breaks.
Rosalind
Resolves that to-night she will be kind to her lover,
Unreflecting, warm and kind.
Celia tells the lessons over,
Counting on her fingers—one and two . . .
Ribbon and shoe,
Skirts, flowers, song, dancing, laughter, eyes . . .

Through the whole catalogue of formal gallantry
 And studious coquetries,
 Counting to herself maliciously.

But the old, the fading shepherdess, Aristonoë,
 Rises stiffly and walks alone
 Down the broad path where densely the laurels
 grow,

And over a little lawn, not closely mown,
 Where wave the flowering grass and the rich
 meadow-sweet.

She seems to walk painfully now and slow
 And drags a little on her high-heeled feet.

She stops at last below
 An old and twisted plum-tree, whose last petal is
 gone,

Leans on the comfortable, rugged bole
 And stares through the green leaves at the droop-
 ing sun.

The tree and the warm light comfort her ageing soul.

On the other lawn behind her, out of sight,
 The girls at play

Drive out melancholy with lively delight
 And the wind carries their songs and laughter
 away.

Some begin dancing and seriously tread
 A modern measure up and down the grass,
 Turn, slide with bending knees and pass
 With dipping hand and poising head,
 Float through the sun in pairs, like newly shed
 And golden leaves astray
 Upon the warm wind of an autumn day,
 When the Indian summer rules the air.

Others, having found,
Lying idly on the sun-hot ground,
Shuttlecocks and battledores,
Play with the buoyant feathers and stare
Dazzled at the plaything as it soars,
Vague against the shining sky,
Where light yet throbs and confuses the eye,
Then see it again, white and clear,
As slowly, poisedly it falls by
The dark green foliage and floats near.
But Celia, apart, is pensive and must sigh
And Anais but faintly pursues the game.
An encroaching, inner flame
Burns in their hearts with the acrid smoke of
 unrest;
But gaiety runs like quicksilver in Rose's breast
And Phillis, rising,
Walks by herself with high and springy tread,
All her young blood racing from heels to head,
Breeding new desires and a new surprising
Strength and determination,
Whereof are bred
Confidence and joy and exultation.

The long day closes;
Rosalind's hour draws near, and Chloe's and
 Rose's,
The hour that Celia has prayed,
The hour for which Anais and Stella have stayed,
When Helen shall forget her wit
And Phillida by a sure arrow at length be hit,
And Phillis, the fleet runner, be at length over-
 taken,

When this bough of young blossoms
 By the rough, eager gatherers shall be shaken.
 Their eyes grow dim,
 Their hearts flutter like taken birds in their bosoms,
 As the light dies out of heaven,
 And a faint, delicious tremor runs through every
 limb
 And faster the volatile blood through their veins is
 driven.

The long day closes;
 The last light fades in the amber sky;
 Warm through the warm dusk glow the roses
 And a heavier shade drops slowly from the trees,
 While through the garden as all colours die
 The scents come livelier on the quickening breeze.
 The world grows larger, vaguer, dimmer,
 Over the dark laurels, a few faint stars glimmer;
 The moon, that was a pallid ghost,
 Hung low on the horizon, faint and lost,
 Comes up, a full and splendid golden round
 By black and sharp-cut foliage overcrossed.
 The girls laugh and whisper now with hardly a
 sound
 Till all sound vanishes, dispersed in the night,
 Like a wisp of cloud that fades in the moon's
 light
 And the garden grows silent and the shadows grow
 Deeper and blacker below
 The mysteriously moving and murmuring trees,
 That stand out darkly against the luminous sky;
 Huge stand the trees,
 Shadowy, whispering immensities,

That rain down quietude and darkness on heart
and eye.

None move, none speak, none sigh,
But from the laurels comes a leaping voice
Crying in tones that seem not man's or boy's
But only joy's,
And hard behind a loud tumultuous crying,
A tangled skein of noise,
And the girls see their lovers come, each vying
Against the next in glad and confident poise
Or softly moving
To the side of the chosen with gentle words and
loving
Gifts for her pleasure of sweetmeats and jewelled
toys.

Dear Love, whose strength no pedantry can stir,
Whether in thine iron enemies
Or in thine own strayed follower,
Bemused with subtleties and sophistries,
Now dost thou rule the garden, now
The gatherer's hands have grasped the scented
bough.

Slow the sweet hours resolve and one by one are
sped.

The garden lieth empty. Overhead
A nightjar rustles by, wing touching wing,
And passes, uttering
His hoarse and whirring note.
The daylight birds long since are fled,
Nor has the moon yet touched the brown bird's
throat.

All's quiet, all is silent, all around
The day's heat rises gently from the ground
And still the broad moon travels up the sky,
Now glancing through the trees and now so high
That all the garden through her rays are shed,
And from the laurels one can just descry
Where in the distance looms enormously
The old house, with all its windows black and
dead.

1918-1921

1918-1921

THE ONLY BEGETTER

THESE are not fair, except you walk with me,
These heathery paths upon the wind-blown
steep;
There could no magic in the wild-flowers be,
Save from your heart they drew it, wild and
deep.

Round the vast world I turn and turn amazed
Mine eyes grow keener for having looked on
you
And what in the world has pleased me and I have
praised
Gives you through me again the praises due.

And have I other loves, what love have they
Of mine, except what in your love I learnt,
In whose eyes first I saw immortal day,
In whose arms first my sorrow to joy was burnt?

Save as you taught, I could not see nor sing
And all I sing is only in your praise,
And you the ultimate spirit of everything
That moves in my heart and colours my fleeting
days.

THE RIDDLE

I DREAM the marriage of the visible
With the unseen, the solving of all skeins;
I dream that in my verse I read the spell,
The last answer to the world's delights and pains,
The gleaming leaves of beeches, the shade thrown
By wavering ripples on the stream-worn stone,
The glowing green of the young wheat, the cries
Of birds, the lapsing sighs
Of spring's warm airs in lucent hedge and tree,
All these and with these too the discontent
Of life's frustration and the vanity
Of happiness too casually spent—
All these I contemplate
And would the seeming with the real fuse,
The lordly vesture with the spirit mate,
And publish in great verse the immortal news.
Still the dream fades; and closer home doth dwell,
Living with me, whether I sleep or wake,
What neither here nor there my hand can take;
Hidden in love lies the unriddled spell,
Nearest the heart and there least scrutable.

A NIGHT PIECE

To Arthur Geddes

COME out and walk. The last few drops of light
Drain silently out of the cloudy blue;
The trees are full of the dark-stooping night,
The fields are wet with dew.

All's quiet in the wood but, far away—
Look down the hillside and across the plain—
Moves, with long trail of white that marks its way,
The softly panting train.

Come through the clearing. Hardly now we see
The flowers, save dark or light against the grass,
Or glimmering silver on a scented tree
That trembles as we pass.

Hark now! So far, so far . . . that distant song . . .
Move not the rustling grasses with your feet.
The dusk is full of sounds, that all along
The muttering boughs repeat.

So far, so faint, we lift our heads in doubt.
Wind, or the blood that beats within our ears,
Has feigned a dubious and delusive note,
Such as a dreamer hears.

Again . . . again! The faint sounds rise and fail.
So far the enchanted tree, the song so low . . .
A drowsy thrush, a waking nightingale?
Silence. We do not know.

THE CATACLYSM

WHEN a great wave disturbs the ocean cold
And throws the bottom waters to the sky,
Strange apparitions on the surface lie,
Great battered vessels, stripped of gloss and gold,
And, writhing in their pain, sea-monsters old,
Who stain the waters with a bloody dye,
With unaccustomed mouths bellow and cry
And vex the waves with struggling fin and fold.

And with these too come little trivial things,
Tossed from the deeps by the same casual hand;
A faint sea-flower, dragged from the lowest sand,
That will not undulate its luminous wings
In the slow tides again, lies dead and swings
Along the muddy ripples to the land.

IN ABSENCE

My lovely one, be near to me to-night,
For now I need you most, since I have gone
Through the sparse woodland in the fading light,
Where in time past we two have walked alone.
I heard the nightjar spin his pleasant note
And saw the wild rose folded up for sleep
And whispered, though the soft word choked my
throat,
Your dear name out across the valley deep.
Be near to me, for now I need you most.
To-night I saw an unsubstantial flame
Flickering along those shadowy paths, a ghost
That turned to me and answered to your name,
Mocking me with a wraith of far delight.
. . . My lovely one, be near to me to-night.

THE GLOW-WORM

To Sylvia and Robert Lynd

THE pale road winds faintly upward into the dark
skies
And beside it on the rough grass that the wind
invisibly stirs,
Sheltered by sharp-speared gorse and the berried
junipers,
Shining steadily with a green light, the glow-worm
lies.

We regard it; and this hill and all the other hills
That fall in folds to the river, very smooth and
steep,
And the hangers and brakes that the darkness
thickly fills
Fade like phantoms round the light, and night is
deep, so deep,

That all the world is emptiness about the still flame
And we are small shadows standing lost in the
huge night.
We gather up the glow-worm, stooping with
dazzled sight,
And carry it to the little enclosed garden whence
we came,

And place it on the short grass. Then the shadowy
flowers fade,

The walls waver and melt and the houses disappear
And the solid town trembles into unsubstantial
shade

Round the light of the burning glow-worm, steady
and clear.

THE SKY AT CAMPDEN

To Eleanor and Alec Miller

FOLD after fold, the smoky clouds come over
The western edge,
Sag, lift and sink and at last discover
A long thin strip of delicate blue sky.
Sharp drawn against it, the thin hedge
Upon the hill-top and the high
Unstirring groves of trees
First catch the sun as the clouds go over,
Sailing eastward to uncover
The airy width of blue.
And all the fields above and here all these
Shine green and golden, slowly fade
And in the shadow lose their burning hue,
Where grass and leaf and corn one hue are made,
And faintly, gradually glow again
As the sun takes them,
Or shudder, veiled in the darkly gleaming rain,
Or ripple over as the wind shakes them,
Turning a new face to the skeltering air,
Lovely in light or rain or shade,
In any weather inalterably fair.

Here the sky hangs so closely overhead,
From Dover's Hill to Blockley, a canopy spread

Roofing the valley with a changing light,
Where, underneath, long roads, winding and white,
Toil up the hill-sides to approach the sky,
Where the small town and all its villages lie,
Ruled and completed by the blue above.

And here the clouds that elsewhere distantly move,
Aloof, remote from human care or love,
Share in our daily life, no further away
Than the old elms or the warm ricks of hay,
And the sky is scarce stranger than the grass we
tread,

And the rain falls softer, kindlier here
Than in other places out of the austere
Hard heavens, wherefrom the traveller bends his
head.

Other skies are strange. We have been where
Earth's friendliness grew thin in the cold air
And the small houses clung to the hill-side
And the restless wind in gaunt trees muttered and
cried

As it fled on. Not so this charmed air
That softly steals by thicket and grove
With the low voice and the tender hands of love,
Or races singing across the fields and throws
Straws and soft grass and flowers lightly down
Where, like the bared heart of a dying rose,
In all its golden beauty glows the town.

And sometimes in the evening all's dove-pale,
When the day-weary breezes fail
And halt to make the valley a fold
For their far-driven flocks of cloud. We see
The cloudy edges of the lifted wold

Melt in the gray and fade in mystery.
Once rising early we beheld
Against dawn's pure and quiet western sky,
Poised in the airless branches of the tree,
A glowing apple night's thick dews had swelled
To sudden ripeness, the first, no neighbour by.
And once a burning haystack in the dusk
Lit up the valley, and all the people came
From the deeper night around, from the sombre
 husk

That burst to show this crimson fruit of flame;
And the tall fire rose into the sky and cast
Reflections and pale twilights far away,
And on the passing clouds a mimic day
That faded as they passed.

Draw back the curtain, throw the window wide!
Midnight. Round love's own dwelling, where we
 dwell,

Silently, softly, those great presences glide,
Nothing their track to tell,
Save where the staring pin-point stars go out;
Still overhead they slide
In slow benignant folding us about.
Love, draw the curtain again and we will sleep:
Let the friendly sky and the clouds our vigil keep.

CHORUS FROM A TRAGEDY

How wonderful the world, how wonderful the
 race
 That binds with rails her savage earth, that rides
 her skies,
That in the sun's inflamed or the moon's tranquil
 face
 Wets her wild soil with tears and lives and loves
 and dies!

Men have not ceased from toil since first they went
 upright,
 Their ships traverse the seas, their bridges span
 the streams,
They harness fire and water and create power and
 light,
 They have overcome the earth in the intervals
 of dreams.

Long has their struggle been, diverse the deeds
 they do,
 Harsh is *their enemy*, bitter the wounds they
 bear;
How many of their sons the merciless water
 slew,
 How many died by fire or tumbled from the
 air?

CHORUS FROM A TRAGEDY 251

Still inch by painful inch the reluctant world is
won,

The mountains' entrails pierced, the highest
summit trod,

And against deadly rain and the uncertain sun
Each year the crops are wrenched from the un-
willing sod,

And houses piled on high that from earth's flesh
are made,

Beasts bound and tamed and taught to be the
slaves of man;

And men arise and burn with lofty hope and fade,
Leaving their sons advanced towards heaven a
little span.

Yea, were not this enough, to have struggled with
the earth,

To have seen their fellows die by famine, fire,
and plague,

To have seen their women anguish in the pangs
of birth,

To have known all these brave souls lost in the
lightless vague?

But man aspires past death, hungers beyond the
flesh,

Dreams of he knows not what, a vast and
shadowy thing,

Forgets his fight with earth and strives to break
the mesh

Even of his own desires, and spread a huger
wing,

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252 CHORUS FROM A TRAGEDY

Forgets his fight with earth, turns from the sullen
foe,
Leaves the far seas uncrossed, the forest still
unpathed,
Lays by his spade and gazes where the high clouds
go
Or idly broods above the sea by moonlight
bathed.

And strange new longings rise and vaguer mightier
dreams
Well in his boundless heart as now through
timeless hours
He hears the murmur of the bridged or unbridged
streams
And sees the fields alight with a million burning
flowers.

Yea, were not this enough? O banded heavens, say,
To have added pain to pain, to have added
dreams to toil,
To have slaved in dreams by night as with his
hands by day,
To have wakened in his breast the soul's dark
serpent-coil?

But dream breeds dream apace and covers all the
world
With a fair image prophesying things to be,
And while through heaving time his fragile life is
hurled
Audacious man hath paused and dreamt he may
be free,

CHORUS FROM A TRAGEDY 253

And pondering greatly thus, leapt on his fellow-
man;

And wars have scored the earth and the sea
drunk her fill,

And marching, ruining armies laid their dusty ban
On harbour, field and barn, and lofty-palaced
hill.

If earth had had a heart, surely that heart was glad
To see her pygmy foes squander their blood in
vain,

To see her hills again in her own loose weeds clad,
To see the dams and dykes yield to her high-
piled rain.

And still the contest grew, still the dream huger
swelled

And with its wings obscured the opening vast
abyss,

Till at the last mankind, in noblest fury held,
Swayed like two wrestlers locked close to a
precipice!

October, 1918

MORNING ON THE HILL

SOFTLY, softly the long bare boughs are rubbed
together,
A dry leaf spindles down, like a bird's light feather.
Still, oh still—
Silence hath laid, in her woods and on her hill,
The sighing wind asleep,
And thin clouds smoke over, gently creep
Across the bare furrows and rubbed grass and
settle down,
Coiling in faint wreaths among the golden stones
of the town.

Still, oh still! There is harm in speaking,
Speech is too hard, speech only means waking
Into a world of words where lovely things are
bound by names,
Where we pursue colour and call her flowers or
flames.

Yet speak if you will, or rather sing
As softly, softly as the bare boughs rubbed to-
gether,
Make no more sound than touch of leaf or feather,
A song as vague as the mist-wreaths that cling
Round the woods and the fields and the bare sides
of the down

MORNING ON THE HILL 255

And the tall ghostly gleaming houses of the town,
A song that shall mix with silence, a faint escaping
thing . . .

Then, then we may find in the magic of this hour
Where it is thought is still, where the brain has no
power,

And words have no meaning except their sound.

SONNET

THE dying man, whom all give up for dead,
Sees how his world a little circle grows,
The fire's warmth falling on the quiet bed,
The sunlight on the wall—sees not, but knows
How at his window the trees bud and leaf
And clouds march in procession through the sky,
Knows, but sees none of these, and his belief
Fails, and he chides his brain for fantasy.
But should he rise at length, should he awake
From that dark sleep and visit once again,
Feeble and slow as a new-sloughing snake,
What were before but hill and sky and plain,
He finds and hails, at each revealing turn,
Gold plains and skies like gems and hills that burn.

DOVER'S HILL

To F. L. Griggs

FROM this hill where the air's so clear
We can see away and away,
And the villages, far as near,
Shine in the lucid day.
On rough short grass we tread
And thistles bend at our feet
And a lark sings overhead
And the clouds are white and fleet.
The wind is strong in our faces,
It drives us, we veer and yield,
And a broken thistle-top races
Over the tossing field;
But below, as we look around,
The deep long plains appear
Like a lost country drowned
In a tranquil flood of air,
Whence now and again there rises
To the listener on this shore
The muffled sound of the voices
Of bells that ring once more.

THE NIGHTJARS

ALL day the cuckoo has sung his double cries,
Far in the woods and hidden, or close but not
seen:

Once he flew overhead and we heard the sound rise
In the song's space and die in a thicket green.

All the day the blackbird has sung with the thrush
And the nightingale, though we heard him not
clear,

And others chirped and murmured from bush to
bush,

Loud, soft, shrill, uncertain, far and near.

Now on the dark hill, after that tumult of song,
Silence settles down, a step before night,
While on the ground, and in the trees, and all
along

The widespread horizon slowly dies the light,

Like a rainbowed fish held dying in the net,
With last lovely flushes to the final gray;
And over the black hill a soft wind blows yet,
Carrying on wide wings the last light away.

How immense the silence! So a fountain falls,
When the jet fails, with a last scattered spray,

And the wind goes on, as the settling thrush calls,
Carrying on soft wings the last echoes away.

Step by step, slowly, we climb the silent hill,
Speechless, almost frightened. As the path
wheels round
Into an open glade where the grass is hushed and
still,
Warmth rises sudden and startling from the
ground.

The trees merge and melt in the fading gray sky,
And now from tree or bush, we cannot tell
where,

A thin sound arises, faintly, haltingly,
Stops to take breath and then fills the quiet air

With a hoarse, sweet music. Thereon, all around,
All the other nightjars join in the whirring song,
And, as we pause to hear, the shadowy trees
resound
Till the whole vague hill-side is filled with the
throng,

Singing louder and louder. But all at once
The chorus gives way to the sweetest voice,
A single and lonely singer, whose unchanging runs
Charm our ears with magic, monotonous noise.

He pauses. We seek him; but the song once gone,
There is nothing to show him. We clap hands in
vain.

Now over the crest a new faint song is begun,
That we can hardly hear. Is it he again?

And as we halt, doubtful, in the darkness growing
Thicker and stranger round us, full of mysteries,
With the first night airs upon our faces blowing,
A dark shape flaps out from the invisible trees,

And slides across our path, a moving clot of night,
His wings knocking loudly as he flies along,
Startling the stillness. And he fades out of our
sight
And in his shadowy thicket resumes the song.

IN ANOTHER COUNTRY

WHEN the lamp's guardian flame was out he fell
Through dark abysses full of hollow sound,
Through caves of sleep that murmured like a shell,
Till in night's furthest corridors he found,
Past any thought or feeling, his escape,
Where being loses shape,
Where sorrow melts and merges in profound
Blackness, that is not pricked by any light.
There he found rest, how long he could not know,
In the deep middle of unfriendly night,
Safe in his stupor through the to and fro
Of the slow hours which strike and will not spare.
But sorrow's pack soon scented that dark lair,
And as he slept he knew that gradually
Light grew around him, lifting veil by veil
The swathings of his hid security,
Till darkness' self grew pale.

Whither he wandered in that middle land,
Shining and silent, between sleep and waking,
How should he tell? But yet he sees them stand,
Those calm and carven poplars, rising, breaking
Like frozen fountains the still, pearl-pure skies,
Sees, but not hears, the soundless aspen shaking
Over the long and lichened seat of stone
Where he awoke. He lifted heedless eyes

Across the lawns and flower-beds overgrown
Up to the house that crowned the terraces,
And down again, and saw the staring pond,
Lucent and smooth and ringed with irises,
The tall yew-hedge, the orchard trees beyond. . . .
All this, most strange, was strange beyond his care,
For grief attended him,
Moved like a wind soft fingers in his hair
And with her touch his burning eyes made dim.
And now his eyes dropped tears, and did not see
The glowing house, poised on the soft low sky,
The rich warm flowers that nodded silently
Around him, or the birds in bush or tree
That moved as noiseless as the clouds. But soon
Across the hush of that too quiet noon
Something unseen yet drew his misty gaze
To look for what he guessed not. So there came
Softly towards him through the garden ways
A girl in white. Like an unreal flame
A golden pattern played upon her dress,
Which as he stared at her he knew to be
Cast by the tears on his own eyelashes,
Gathering softly and heavily.

Then as again his eyes were dimmed by tears
And with the falling echo of old fears
His heart was filled, he bowed his head and felt
Her sudden soothing hand upon his hair;
And moved by a strange reverence he knelt,
Hiding his hot face in her hollow palms,
And laid upon her lap his vague despair,
Till as a mild wind risen at evening calms
The last black vapours from a tumbled sky,

Her touch serenely rolled away his care
And shed on him her own tranquillity.

A timeless moment thus he stayed and drew
Peace from her hands and from her face unseen
And in that posture greater quiet knew
Than ever yet his heart had found between
The grinding wheels of wakefulness and sleep,
Which day or night are full of restless sound,
Laments of giants bound
Or lost birds crying on the lightless deep.
A moment—then the darkness of her hand
Grew thicker round his eyes and held no more
The warm reflected sunshine of that land . . .
Deeper and colder . . . and a shudder tore
His waking body and a thin noise sighed
Through a new darkness dense and terrible
That blackened round him. "Stay, stay, stay!" he
cried,
Like the harsh notes of a storm-shaken bell.
But thicker all about the shadow fell,
Till with a pang he opened heavy eyes
On the beginning of a pale sunrise,
That flickered chilly on the lamp and bed.
Outside his window the sad aspen shook,
Murmuring loudly, and its tapered head
The poplar sighing bowed. An early rook
In the stiff elm rehearsed the grating cry
Which all the others answered back again.
Burdened by life and by a memory,
He rose to join the usual world of men.

A HOLLOW ELM

To Edward Marsh

WHAT hast thou not withstood,
 Tempest-despising tree,
Whose bloat and riven wood
 Gapes now so hollowly,
What rains have beaten thee through many years,
What snows from off thy boughs have dripped like
tears?

Calmly thou standest now
 Upon thy sunny mound;
The first spring breezes flow
 Past with sweet dizzy sound;
Yet on thy pollard top the branches few
Stand stiffly out, disdain to murmur too.

The children at thy foot
 Open new-lighted eyes
Where on gnarled bark and root
 The soft warm sunshine lies—
Dost thou upon thine ancient sides resent
The touch of youth, quick and impermanent?

These at the beck of spring
 Live in the moment still;

A HOLLOW ELM

265

Thy boughs unquivering,
Remembering winter's chill
And many other winters past and gone,
Are mocked, not cheated, by the transient sun.

Hast thou so much withstood,
Dumb and unmoving tree,
That now thy hollow wood
Stiffens disdainfully
Against the soft spring airs and soft spring rain,
Knowing too well that winter comes again?

THE GLADE

WE may raise our voices even in this still glade;
Though the colours and shadows and sounds so
fleeing seem,
We shall not dispel them. They are not made
Frailly by earth or hands, but immortal in our
dream.

We may touch the faint violets with the hands of
thought
Or lay the pale core of the wild arum bare;
And for ever in our minds the white wild cherry
is caught,
Cloudy against the sky and melting into air.

This which we have seen is eternally ours,
No others shall tread in the glade which now
we see;
Their hands shall not touch the frail tranquil
flowers,
Nor their hearts faint in wonder at the wild
white tree.

STANZAS WRITTEN IN DEJECTION

How then, my dark and empty spirit,
Wouldst thou employ these brooding days?
The senses lose their trivial merit,
The sky grows chill, the rose decays;
We are not now what we have been,
We see no more what we have seen.

Thus in the middle of her season
Sometimes the flowering may doth fade.
Who knoweth by what inner treason
Her rich adornment is betrayed?
Now as the blossom from the tree
So falls my old content from me.

I cannot tell what saps me so
And takes enjoyment from my mind:
I only see the bright months grow
Duller or my weak eyes more blind.
This year hath ousted from my breast
Joy for a dark and vague unrest.

I read in some forgotten story
How in the mountains of the west
Where the calm sea in sun-flecked glory
Under the snow-peaks lies at rest,
The dying eagle seeks a place
Where a great wind drives up in space;

268 STANZAS WRITTEN IN DEJECTION

And there though from his failing wings
 Motion has gone with joy and strength,
 On the ascending stream he swings
 Into the sky and sees at length
 On the warm current soaring high
 The ledge where first he learnt to fly,

The valleys where of old he preyed,
 The eyries where he dwelt and loved,
 The eyrie where his nest was made
 Which long the tempest hath removed—
 In his ascent he sees these things
 And needs no motion of his wings.

And still up-borne he rises higher
 And fades from his companions' sight,
 Lost in the sun's descending fire,
 Floating amid a sea of light—
 Would that we too, when pleasures fail,
 Could find at last that upward gale!

Would that we too, no effort making,
 On such a current could aspire
 Through the thick air and cloud-wreaths
 breaking
 Into the heights that we desire,
 There in a lonely still delight
 To float upon a sea of light!

THE SWIMMERS

THE cove's a shining plate of blue and green
With darker belts between
The trough and crest of the lazily rising swell,
And the great rocks throw purple shadows down
Where transient sun-sparks wink and burst and
drown,

And the distant glimmering floor of pebble and shell
Is bright or hidden as the shadow wavers,
And everywhere the restless sun-steeped air
Trembles and quavers,
As though it were

More saturate with light than it could bear.
Now come the swimmers from slow-dripping caves,
Where the shy fern creeps under the veined roof,
And wading out meet with glad breast the waves.
One holds aloof,

And climbs alone the reef with shrinking feet
That scarce endure the jagged stone's dull heat,
Till on the edge he poises
And flies toward the water, vanishing
In wreaths of white, with echoing liquid noises,
And swims beneath, a vague, distorted thing.

Now all the other swimmers leave behind
The crystal shallow and the foam-wet shore
And sliding into deeper water find

A living coolness in the lifting flood:
Then through their bodies leaps the sparkling
 blood,

So that they feel the faint earth's drought no more.
There now they float, heads raised above the green,
White bodies cloudily seen,

Further and further from the brazen rock
On which the hot air shakes, on which the tide
Vainly throws with soundless shock

The cool and lagging wave. Out, out they go,
And now upon a mirrored cloud they ride

Or turning over, with soft strokes and slow,
Slide on like shadows in a tranquil sky.

Behind them, on the tall parched cliff, the dry
And dusty grasses grow

In shallow ledges of the arid stone,
Starving for coolness and the touch of rain.

But, though to earth they must return again,
Here come the soft sea airs to meet them, blown
Over the surface of the outer deep,
Scarce moving, staying, falling, straying, gone,
Light and delightful as the touch of sleep. . . .

One wakes and splashes round,
And magically all the others wake
From their sea-dream, and now with rippling sound
Their arms the silence break.

And now again the crystal shallows take
The dripping bodies whose cool hour is done:
They pause upon the beach, they pause and sigh,
Then vanish in the caverns one by one.

Soon the wet footmarks on the stones are dry:
The cove sleeps on beneath the unwavering sun.

THE ROCK POOL

To Alice Warrender

THIS is the sea. In these uneven walls
A wave lies prisoned. Far and far away
Outward to ocean, as the slow tide falls,
Her sisters through the capes that hold the bay
Dancing in lovely liberty recede.
Yet lovely in captivity she lies,
Filled with soft colours, where the waving weed
Moves gently and discloses to our eyes
Blurred shining veins of rock and lucent shells
Under the light-shot water; and here repose
Small quiet fish and dimly glowing bells
Of sleeping sea-anemones that close
Their tender fronds and will not now awake
Till on these rocks the waves returning break.

FÊTE GALANTE: THE DANCER

BETWEEN the hither and the further woods,
On whose dark branches beats the sun in vain,
Out in the midst where the intense light broods,
There moves a livelier light, a living fire
With speed that seems
That still and sleeping radiance to disdain,
And yet no more to tire
Than the quick shapes that haunt our happy
dreams.

Light-skirted, feather-footed, laughing, dancing,
Borne on a breath of swift and buoyant air,
Turning and sidling, retiring and advancing,
She moves like thistledown, she floats away,
Swings and returns, lifts eyes to take the stare
Of the delighted watchers. Rise and sway
Her skirts about her; and now she slowly
moves,
As though an unseen choir of singing Loves
Hovered about her thrown-back head and cried
Delicious praise down to her smiling pride.
And every turn of her young body makes
A silent changing music, fast or slow,
Which as she pauses breaks
And sinks upon itself in shining overthrow.

FÊTE GALANTE: THE DANCER 273

Silence unbroken follows the silent measure,
The enraptured group that watched her quietly
breathes

In the arrested silence of that pause
An air filled full with the sweet scent of pleasure.
Then, as a swordsman slowly sheathes
The blade wherewith he wove a net of light,
So she in ordinary flesh withdraws
The coloured image, volatile and bright,
That danced before them and enchanted them.
Her arms fall softly to her sides,
Soft to the knee falls the skirt's airy hem,
The taut knees bend, the waist relaxes, swift
Down on the grass the unstrung body slides.
She lies there huddled, hidden the flushed face,
Her shoulders heaving up the filmy shift,
One leg outstretched in spent, neglectful grace.

Low mutter they their praise that softly reaches
The panting girl. She does not raise her head
But at the music of their grateful speeches
All her slack body comfortably glows
And in ecstatic weariness she makes
The sun-warmed turf a bed;
Her limbs fall looser, the soft eyelids close,
She sleeps. No voice her languid slumber breaks;
But now the watchers, musing deep and far,
Lift up their eyes
Towards the vague, the sapphirine calm skies,
While, like a visionary moving star,
Still through their thoughts her dancing image
flies.

CONSTANTINOPLE

I suddenly realise that the ambition of my life has been—since I was two—to go on a military expedition against Constantinople. . . . This is nonsense.—*Letters of Rupert Brooke.*

It still waits redeeming.—JAMES ELROY FLECKER.

FIRST VOICE

No more, they say, the Host is raised in that
Cathedral which was mine.

SECOND VOICE

Like you I too beneath that dome have eat the
bread and drunk the wine
That's banished thence, but not like yours my
empire shook at last and fell
And then I died upon the walls built by another
Constantine.

FIRST VOICE

All's changed, they say, all's changed within that
lovely and most sacred shell,
And where dark unbelievers pray no more the holy
eikons shine.

SECOND VOICE

I do not know. I do not know. When I went out to
fight that day

My starving people filled the streets and cheered
 me thinly on my way.
 Behind me lay the Christian town, before me stood
 the infidel;
 And they were many, we were few—I know no
 more but that I fell.
 I could not see or hear or ask, my face being
 masked with blood and clay.

FIRST VOICE

Byzantium was proud and strong. When war and
 fire had struck and ceased,
 To build her lovelier than before I took the trea-
 sures of the east.
 A thousand cunning artists worked on floor and
 pillar, porch and dome,
 In marble and in precious stones to make the Holy
 Wisdom's home;
 And there when all the toil was done I knelt and
 prayed, I bowed my head,
 Knowing that now Byzantium was royal as the
 elder Rome.

SECOND VOICE

And is the Holy Wisdom fled since that fierce
 creed rolled o'er my head?

FIRST VOICE

The heathen prays where once we prayed, now
 that both you and I are dead.
 Poor fallen king, nine hundred years from me to
 you the city stood

And seven centuries her walls were washed in vain
with Moslem blood,
An angry tide that rose to flood and boiled and
stormed and ebbd again,
Where like a torrent in the sea the blood of our
own Greeks was shed.

SECOND VOICE

So deep I fell in my defeat, the centuries that wax
and wane
Have passed like shadows on the grave wherein I
lie and do not know
How many years are gone since then, how fares it
with your sacred fane.

FIRST VOICE

I am a shade no less than you—thin rumours reach
us here below.
How should I tell what falls on earth and how the
tides of battle flow?
Yet it is said the Christians go against the heathen
in our seat
Though four long sullen centuries have left un-
answered your defeat.

SECOND VOICE

There were young men who fought with me, who
stood with me upon the walls.
Would in this waste of empty time that somewhere
they and I could meet!
They were my brothers and my friends who fought
to keep the city free,

And I would take their hands again . . . something
 within me stirs and calls . . .
 O God, Whose house I fought to save, send back
 my ancient friends to me,
 They who were bound by the same bond and died
 in armour as I died!

FIRST VOICE

Who is it comes?

SECOND VOICE

In this lone place, what younger
 shadow wavers near?
 None of my friends could find me here, the wastes
 of hell are dark and wide,
 And yet . . . and yet . . .

FIRST VOICE

Who are you? Speak! We
 are two shades and nought to fear.

THIRD VOICE

I died a soldier.

SECOND VOICE

I as well. Come, brother, closer to
 my side.
 How come you, from what battlefield, what
 banners had your enemy?

THIRD VOICE

I was a poet, I was young, a northern island gave
 me birth,

I knew and loved my fellow-men, I knew and
loved the lovely earth,
Yet in my youth I married death and gave my life
without a sigh,
Gave all the love I bore and had, came to the eastern
sea to die.
My foes were yours.

SECOND VOICE

The tale is true! Still they
oppose the infidel!

FIRST VOICE

God's mercy hath designed an end—speak on,
young soldier, you speak well.
Tell us how Christian arms again were carried up
the Golden Horn
And how again the Christian cross was planted on
our citadel.

THIRD VOICE

I died before, I lay alone, my comrades stormed
the beach and hill,
But where the earth was red and torn, my wistful
spirit followed still.

FIRST VOICE

I heard the thunder of that war, an unknown
thunder strange to hear,
Beat like a wave on Islam's shore, like doom within
the Sultan's ear.

SECOND VOICE

O brother, speak! You died before, but still you
 saw the army go
 Between the city's holy walls and drive the heathen
 from our throne.
 Brother, upon those walls I fell, I fell four hundred
 years ago,
 Tell me——

THIRD VOICE

Within my valley-grave I felt a peace
 till then unknown,
 Happy I had not died in vain nor those who died
 away from me . . .

FIRST VOICE

He pauses and his voice is lost, the fire of speech is
 drowned with tears.

SECOND VOICE

O new companion, speak again, we have waited
 here so many years!

THIRD VOICE

In life I had loved earth so well, the ties of earth
 and flesh were strong,
 And after I was laid in earth Scyros the island held
 me long,
 Till on a day the rumour came that sent me here
 below to you,
 Sickened of earth by grief and shame to know my
 childish dream untrue.

FIRST VOICE

What is the news you strive to tell? Has the first
Mass not yet been said
Beneath the dome where once I knelt and bowed a
proud imperial head?

THIRD VOICE

No Christian stands beneath that dome to eat the
bread or drink the wine,
No Mass has there been said or sung, but praises
in a heathen tongue
To those who gave the Turk again the sacred walls
of Constantine.

SECOND VOICE

We died in vain, my friends and I.

THIRD VOICE

My friends and
I have died in vain.

FIRST VOICE

Nought given in the city's cause is wholly lost. The
walls remain.
O, raise your heads, my friends, and know that
while the soaring dome shall stand,
Though heathens hold it for a space the city still is
Christian land,
And though the years we wait be long, and black
the deed and deep the shame,
Yet still shall hope burn like a flame while Christian
hearts and swords are strong.

O youngest friend, have peace awhile: though you
should wait as long as we,
The life you gave was not in vain and you shall see
the city free.

Note.—This poem was written in February, 1920, on reading the announcement that Constantinople was to be handed back to the Turk. The three speakers are Justinian, Constantine Palæologus and Rupert Brooke. The verbal reminiscences of Flecker are, of course, deliberate.

THE SHADOW

DEATH, would I feared not thee,
But ever can I see
Thy mutable shadow thrown
Upon the walls of Life's warm, cheerful room.
Companioned or alone,
I feel the presence of that following gloom,
Like one who vaguely knows
Behind his back the shade his body throws—
'Tis not thy shadow only, 'tis my own!

I face towards the light
That rises fair and bright
Over wide fields asleep,
But still I know that stealthy darkness there
Close at my heels doth creep,
My ghostly company, my haunting care;
And if the light be strong
Before my eyes, through pleasant hours and long,
Then, then, the shadow is most black and deep.

BOATS AT NIGHT

How lovely is the sound of oars at night
And unknown voices, borne through windless air,
From shadowy vessels floating out of sight
Beyond the harbour lantern's broken glare
To those piled rocks that make on the dark wave
Only a darker stain. The splashing oars
Slide softly on as in an echoing cave
And with the whisper of the unseen shores
Mingle their music, till the bell of night
Murmurs reverberations low and deep
That droop towards the land in swooning flight
Like whispers from the lazy lips of sleep.
The oars grow faint. Below the cloud-dim hill
The shadows fade and now the bay is still.

PUPPET SONG

(From *Fête Galante*, an opera libretto written for Dame Ethel Smyth and produced at Covent Garden on June 11, 1923. The song explains action carried on in dumb show.)

SINCE in deceit there is much pleasure
And since the world is all a cheat,
Spare, O dancers, a moment's leisure
To watch our pointed brief deceit.
Stay, stay, stay!
These are but dolls, as you are, in the play.

The world turns at its usual pace
While Harlequin to Columbine
Laments her forfeit, smiling face
And in his sorrow seems divine,
While with a nod
Old Pantaloon leads in the embroiling god.

Who were despoiled, if Pierrot then
Still in his garden lounged and dreamed
Himself the happiest of men
And all the future what it seemed?
Ah, woe betide
The world, if every bridegroom knew his bride!

But Pierrot, seeing, draws a knife
And leaps on unarmed Harlequin

To let the sawdust of his life
In vengeance of the mimic sin,
And Columbine
Sinks down half-swooning at the fell design.

O, what a doll can suffer! See,
What bravery in a puppet's part!
Now Pierrot, of his charity,
The knife hath stuck in his own heart.
For love he dies
And only half in pain his mistress cries.

Now Harlequin has got his bride,
And Pantaloon has had his fun,
And love will never be denied,
And, gracious folk, the show is done!
No longer stay!
These were, like you, but puppets in a play.

288 TO THE UNKNOWN VOICE

Forgotten voice, speak, speak again,
Clearer than winds or waves or men.
Like a lost friend in countries far away,
Thou hast been for so long a day:
Yet rise again, yet speak again to me;
I dwindle, wanting thee!

TO THE UNKNOWN LIGHT

In the sad spirit
Where all is dark
And fault and merit
Are gray shapes stark,
Each like his neighbour
And each dim,
And pleasure and labour
Alike are grim,
Shine down, O Light,
Illumine this night.

Here in the gray
Nor motion nor breath
Nor joy of day
Nor sharpness of death
Relieves the endless
Pitiless gloom
Where goeth friendless
Desire to her doom:
Shine down, O Light,
Illumine this night.

I know thou livest,
Then shine, then shine,
Thou that givest
Help divine,

290 TO THE UNKNOWN LIGHT

Turn on this cold
Thy burning eyes
Ere starved and old
The dark heart dies:
Shine down, O Light,
Illumine this night.

THE EMIGRATION

BEFORE dawn, under the windless mountains, the
people
Came from their villages, assembling clan by clan,
Through the last hours of night over black dusty
roads
Trailing reluctant feet, driving the slow waggons,
Men, women and children in the cold dusk con-
founded.
Hardly a ray of light from the muffled sky,
Hardly in that still dawn a sound from quiet air,
Only the endless murmur of feet shuffling on,
The sobbing of tired children, and a woman's
tears
Held in her bosom like a stream running in dark-
ness,
And a young man's quickened breath that made no
more
Than a puff of white on the chill air. Night was
long,
That night in the valley, and all the winds were
still.
Slow and unseen came the first ascent of the road
That led to the hidden path and another world.
Here first the way grew stony, here first the feet
Of the weaker stumbled and were bruised, the
pebbles

Slipped under aching soles wrenching the careless
ankle;

And now from summits yet in darkness unknown,
From snowy slopes and dizzy, ice-belted peaks,
Stole, with the louder sounding of the water-fall,
A still wind hardly moving whose gentle breath
Crept through woollen cloaks like the trickling of
water.

The king, their leader, daunted his stout stallion
And drew into a rocky cleft whence he watched
The sad procession winding upwards in silence,
Marked every drooping shoulder that bore a spear
And every woman that held in cramped arms
A child to her breast and every walking child
That whimpered and stumbled. He saw them all,
Though gray through the gray night they drooped
and stumbled.

When the last had gone he turned and rode down-
wards,
Carefully, leaning back on his horse's haunches,
And before him unseen, like messengers in haste,
Plunged the rattling stones dislodged by the hooves.

On the flat land he first saw the growing light
That hovered on the swift stream rustling beside
him,
Ice-cold, ice-gray, endlessly tossed and heaved
In small blunt waves, as down from the glacier,
Hung aloft still in night, it fled to the valley,
There to grow calm, to grow smooth and peaceable,
Spreading in reedy brooks through the water-
meadows

Where the tadpoles thicken the stream and dragon-
flies

Mate in late spring on their dizzy flights.
Here the king paused as the twilight brightened.
Light swelled as into an aching head comes sleep,
Thus unknown, unperceived, but steadily growing,
Till the near fields were distinct and the nearest
farm

Plainly to be seen, with byre, barn and sheds,
And there on the dung-heap a lazy cock
Moving sluggish wings and lifting his head.
And the light grew. And, beyond, the land was
revealed,

Pastures and grain and the scattered houses
Over which the elms spread out their broad
branches;

And further beyond rose the desolate hills
Covered with stubborn bushes, bracken and wiry
grass,

And the poisonous green marshes that lay in their
hollows,
Bounding the narrow valley with an iron wall.

So, since the valley was narrow and close-bounded,
A circle of fruitfulness hemmed in by the unfruitful,
Since the quiet race brought forth ever more chil-
dren,

Sons must leave their fathers, daughters their
mothers,

The quiet be the unquiet and stay-at-homes be
wanderers.

No words came to the king's lips. He gazed around
him,

Slipped under aching soles wrenching the careless
ankle;

And now from summits yet in darkness unknown,
From snowy slopes and dizzy, ice-belted peaks,
Stole, with the louder sounding of the water-fall,
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mothers,

The quiet be the unquiet and stay-at-homes be
wanderers.

No words came to the king's lips. He gazed around
him,

Dumbly regarding the land where to-day his
brother

Ruled in his place. Far away his eyes travelled,
Seeing the first smoke rising from a farmhouse,
Twenty feet untroubled in the motionless air.

They are rising, he whispered, the wife has lighted
Their fire and the husband pauses in the door
To look at his cattle grazing in the meadows.

So have we all; and when we are gone
Still every morning the fires will be lighted,
Men will go to the fields and bring in the crops.
In the cool dark barn where my oats were gathered,
Where I rested on the heap and took soft handfuls
Of the smooth hard grain that ran through my
fingers,

This year my brother will gather his oats
And coming in tired from walking his fields,
Dazed with summer's glare, will throw himself
down

On the yielding heap and hear the whispering
Of the flowing grain that trickles round his body
—Next year as well, and many, many years.

The light grew strong: it was now full morning.
He turned his horse and rode like a storm
After the marching people. Up the steep track
The horse's strong shoulders forced the ground
behind him,

Plunging and pulling. The blue sky above
Grew brighter and colder: with a rush of cold
waters

The torrent hurled downwards in its narrow channel.
On the high shoulder of the wind-swept mountain

The track turned round and beyond the corner
The king in his haste found the people halted,
Below them the abyss—and the shelving path
Stretched narrow and treacherous into the distance.
Strung out along it, huddled and comfortless,
They made their poor breakfast. Their sullen eyes
Looked only at the hard stone beneath their feet,
Not backwards or forwards. But a group of women
Clustered at the edge with gestures and sad cries,
And in the midst of them a silent woman
Stared into the gulf. For she was the mother
Of the first that died, of the child whose foot
Had turned on a pebble, throwing him over,
Down, down, down, bouncing from ledge to ledge.
There now his body, spread-eagled on the rubble,
Alone, abandoned, waited vultures and wolves.
The king rode past, saying nothing. His grim lips
Were frozen hard by pain and love of his people.
His hard bleak eyes stared onward where the
 ribbon-path
Vanished in the waste of the tumbled snowy moun-
 tains,
Peak after peak and chasm after chasm,
Mercilessly lighted by the cold lucid sun.

•

THE END

I DREAMT that I was standing in a wood
Where the trees parted and a ride came through,
Not used by many, for the undergrowth,
Saplings five inches high and nettles, spread
Across the ruts even to the middle. And
On either side the tall trees rose and brambles
Looped round the heavy boles their thorny ropes.
Down the long track came slowly a weary rider.
His horse's hooves made no sound in the wood,
They moved so slowly. The horse was bony and
old,

With ragged mane and tail and gnarled thin legs
And head that drooped from the loose-hanging
reins.

The rider was old and thin, his clothes were shabby,
His saddle scratched and worn, his stirrups dull,
Pitted with rust. He held between his hands
Upon the saddle-bow a cup wrapped loosely
In old discoloured rags. I could not see
What shape it was, or whether of metal or glass,
But as I looked I saw the rider's eyes
Bent burning on it. Never on the road
He turned his gaze but still upon the cup
He stared and still the horse walked slowly on,
Reins hanging on its scraggy neck. I saw
Those eyes, so fiercely still, burn on the cup

And round them all the lines of the thin face
Grooved by despair and shame that made a victory
Seem like defeat—as joyless. Then behind
The rider came a crowd of men and women
Who walked the track as soundlessly as he.
Behind the brambles dizzily I stared
And half saw some and others not at all,
But all I saw were such as every day
Walk about city streets. There were rich men
Glossily dressed, and women in stale rags,
Children with smeary faces, dowdy women,
Fussily proper, clerks, workmen, and tramps,
And young girls proud still of their pretty bodies,
And young men thinking of their games, and
schoolboys

Carrying books. Thus through the wood they went,
Following the rider, and their trampling boots
Fell soundless on the thick-grown track, their
breathing
Never disturbed the dust that in the air
Rose from the full-blown meadow sweet.

They marched
On and on unending, rank after rank,
And still the long grass waved about their feet
Unbroken. In their various faces I
Could read nothing. Willing, uneager eyes
Followed the rider, fading now from sight.
After them in like procession came
A cavalcade of beasts, the homely animals
That live about our houses, dogs and cats
And horses, and the small beasts of the fields,
And mixed with them strange unknown tropical
things,

Flaming tigers and quaint-shaped burrowing
brutes,

Hopping, leaping and crawling, and snakes and
birds

That hovered in flocks above the track and alighted
And flew again, cuckoo and eagle and dove

Mixing together. I gazed between the leaves

And still a mist hung heavy on my eyes

Blurring these shapes. And when they all were
gone

Time paused an instant. Then the trees seemed
To drag their long roots slowly from the ground
And follow after, and the bushes too,

And like a swarm of bees the smaller plants,

Slender-stalked and starry-leafed, arose

And from my face the screen of bramble boughs

Suddenly fell; and all in that strange train

Swept onward and the earth was black and bare

And I was left alone, unsheltered, unshaded.

I looked around and there was nothing left,

No living thing, man, animal or plant

But bleak dead earth where no wind moved, rain
fell,

Fire burnt. And still I stood. Then there came
slowly

On the same way a figure mountain-high

Whose bright horns in the clouds, had there been
clouds,

Would have projected. In his hands before him

He held a book, open, which he studied closely,

Walking on soundless feet, with downcast eyes.

And as he reached the spot where not my body

But now my fleshless spirit stood in terror

He paused and raised his head. The thundercloud
 eyes
Stared up into the blank and colourless heaven,
Then down again upon the fatal page.
He closed the volume up. Then there was nothing.

MEMORY

IN silence and in darkness memory wakes
Her million sheathèd buds and breaks
Her day-long winter when the light and noise
And hard bleak breath of the outward-looking will
Made barren her tender soil, when every voice
Of her million airy birds was muffled or still.

One bud-sheath breaks:
One sudden voice awakes.

What change grew in our hearts seeing one night
That moth-winged ship drifting across the bay,

Her broad sail dimly white
On cloudy waters and hills as vague as they?
Some new thing touched our spirits with distant
delight,

Half seen, half noticed, as we loitered down,
Talking in whispers, to the little town,

Down from the narrow hill
—Talking in whispers, for the air so still
Imposed its silence on our lips and made
A quiet equal with the equal shade
That filled the slanting walk. That phantom now
Slides with slack canvas and unwhispering prow
Through the dark sea that this dark room has
made.

Or the night of the closed eyes will turn to day
And all day's colours start out of the gray.
The sun burns on the water. The tall hills
Push up their shady groves into the sky
And fail and cease where the intense light spills
Its parching torrent on the gaunt and dry
Rock of the further mountains, whence the
snow

That softened their harsh edges long is gone
And nothing tempers now
The hot flood falling on the barren stone.

O memory, take and keep
All that my eyes, your servants, bring you home—
Those other days beneath the low white dome
Of smooth-spread clouds that creep
As slow and soft as sleep,
When shade grows pale and the cypress stands
upright,
Distinct in the cool light,
Rigid and solid as a dark, hewn stone;
And many another night
That melts in darkness on the narrow quays
And changes every colour and every tone
And soothes the waters to a softer ease,
When under constellations coldly bright
The homeward sailors sing their way to bed
On ships that motionless in harbour float.
The circling harbour-lights flash green and red.
And, out beyond, a steady travelling boat
Breaking the swell with slow industrious oars
At each stroke pours
Pale lighted water from the lifted blade.

Now in the painted houses all around
 Slow darkening windows call
The empty unwatched middle of the night.
The tide's few inches rise without a sound.
On the black promontory's windless head,
The last awake, the fireflies rise and fall
And tangle up their dithering skeins of light.

O memory, take and keep
All that my eyes, your servants, bring you home!
 Thick through the changing year
The unexpected, rich-charged moments come,
 That you 'twixt wake and sleep
In the lids of the closed eyes shall make appear.

This is life's certain good,
Though in the end it be not good at all,
 When the dark end arises
And the stripped, startled spirit must let fall
 The amulets that could
Prevail with life's but not death's sad devices.

Then, like a child from whom an older child
 Forces its gathered treasures,
Its beads and shells and strings of withered flowers,
 Tokens of recent pleasures,
The soul must lose from eyes weeping and wild
 Those prints of vanished hours.

THE FARMER'S WIDOW

THE old farmer failed and had to sell his land
But kept the house his life-time and his widow's.
He died at last. The unmarried daughter came
To live at home. The house is like a boat
Fallen from a foundering ship and washed ashore
In unfamiliar fields, beyond the beach,
Useless and unapproached. The great cool dairy
Is empty all the week, the labourers
Elsewhere receive their wage on Saturdays.
Here live these women in the midst of fields
Which all their lives long they have called their
 own,
But where their favourite paths are all ploughed
 up,
Their favourite hedge-gaps wired. The daughter
 tries
To keep the garden tidy, but the lawn
Grows ranker and ranker, and on the garden
 beds
Each year the barbarous thistle wins the match,
And the red gravel of the drive which sweeps
Before the house is greener than a pond.
The mother walks the lanes, grieving at change,
New milking sheds put up, the old barn pulled
 down,
Fields under plumey maize, the hill-side fenced.

304 THE FARMER'S WIDOW

But her grief is dry-eyed, until she finds
Under an open shed a broken cart,
One wheel off, canted dismal and forlorn,
And under the new master's style she reads
There in faint palimpsest her husband's name.

ARMISTICE DAY, 1921

THE hush begins. Nothing is heard
Save the arrested taxis throbbing
And here and there an ignorant bird
And here a sentimental woman sobbing.

The statesman bares and bows his head
Before the solemn monument:
His lips, paying duty to the dead
In silence, are more than ever eloquent.

But ere the sacred silence breaks
And taxis hurry on again,
A faint and distant voice awakes,
Speaking the mind of a million absent men:

"Mourn not for us. Our better luck
At least has given us peace and rest.
We struggled when our moment struck
But now we understand that death knew best.

"Would we be as our brothers are
Whose barrel-organs charm the town?
Ours was a better dodge by far—
We got *our* pensions in a lump sum down.

"We, out of all, have had our pay,
There is no poverty where we lie:
The graveyard has no quarter-day,
The space is narrow but the rent not high.

"No empty stomach here is found:
Unless some cheated worm complain
You hear no grumbling underground:
O, never, never wish us back again!

"Mourn not for us, but rather we
Will meet upon this solemn day
And in our greater liberty
Keep silent for you, a little while, and pray."

WINTER TREES

Is the tree's life in bearing leaves
And flowers and fruit in turn? and may
The voice that in dry branches grieves
Be only the wind's going its way?

Those black boughs drawn on the white sky
In stiff and intricate design—
Does that substantial character
Declare no real life within?

If so, we men, what life have we
When at the last we stand alone,
Love, children, combat, poetry,
And all our proud conceptions gone?

Still the unmoving winter trees
Hold up the pure curves of their boughs,
Forms clothing calm immortal life
No change of time or state can rouse.

THE ISLAND OF YOUTH

To H. C. Harwood

ARGUMENT

It was foretold by the oracle that Achilles, son of the sea-goddess Thetis, and of Peleus, King of Thessaly, should have a glorious life but an early and violent death. When the Greek chieftains prepared their expedition against Troy, his mother, hoping to avert this doom, conveyed him to Scyros, where she hid him among the maidens of the island, disguised by her enchantments as one of them. It was also foretold that the Greeks should not take Troy without the help of Achilles, and Ulysses was therefore sent to find him out, which he did by means of a trick. During his concealment on the island Achilles loved Deidamia, the king's daughter, who afterwards bore him a son.

PROLOGUE

IN the world's huge and teeming memory
Nothing is lost. There is a realm behind
The cloud-veil of the tense and reasoning brain,
Which in the wind of ecstasy to and fro
Floats with inconstant motion. In that kingdom
The dreams of earlier dreamers with our own
Are mixed and made one substance, and in dreams
We too can move there, shadowlike and dim,
Seeing around us figures of more life
Than ordinary light reveals; and nought
Is there forbid to any questioner
Whom labouring man brings forth, though dull
his vision

And the clear instinct with much knowledge
clogged

And turned to creeping ignorance. So we,
A mingled blood, but yet not wiser thence,
Having the distant levels of the earth
Constricted to the perfect round and frame
Of our own narrow, all-embracing minds,
Look back in poor humility—as one
Out of the cramping wisdom of middle age
Upon the child's airy, blue-vaulted dreams,
Seeing there wisdom more than life hath since
Given to his years, how many they may be—
So we look back and in that world of youth,

THE ISLAND OF YOUTH

Which seems a mirror made by happier hands,
Can see ourselves freed from time's accidents,
That world of youth, when imagination free
Like a clear wax took true impress of life
And the sharp images preserved till now.
These the world's memory, our larger self,
Will not sequester from us, being ours,
So long as we, peering among the shadows,
Can find there comelier pictures of ourselves.

Men wax and wane upon the enduring earth;
Their buildings like a season-flowering weed
Flicker across her crumbling ribs of land,
Rise and are gone and rise and go again;
And if an angel should incline his head
To watch the curious globe he might perceive
An endless movement seeming to bring forth
Nothing. Yet the pale, active flame of life
That plays upon the surface of the earth
Hath wonders greater than the heavens bred,
Nobility out of rebellious flesh
And honour out of animal desires.
These in eternal being are preserved
And grow in numbers as the æons go,
Taking the race of man
Only a little from its recent birth,
In beastly appetites and beastly ruts,
Stiffly contending with the other beasts.
But if I move the mirror's veil I see
The vast expanse before my shrinking eyes,
Cloudy and affrighting with the age-dim shapes
That stir and take new life. What then am I?
And what the mirror? Are we separate?

For in my breast these figures move and live
That here I see, and also I with them
Suffer and struggle in the mirror's depths
Among the mists and lights of earlier time.
And what is this familiar voice that speaks
In tones like mine, yet with a nobler ring,
Spelling the deeds that in the glass are done,
With words which doubtfully I apprehend,
The sense half-caught, the music out of tune?

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THE ISLAND OF YOUTH

HARDLY the first sweet day of sun and showers
On which with dewy lashes the world awakes
And in the pale glass of the stretchèd sky,
Misty with her own tears, sees blurred and dim
Her half-forgotten youth—hardly that day
Had stepped from troubled wave to quiet wave
Before the maidens of the island learnt
They had a new companion. She was tall
And fashioned with a grave and queenly beauty
Wherein the darkness of a grief to come
Shone deep but lustrous, as upon the sand
Of shallow seas on clear and windless days
The shadow of the boat deepens, not flaws,
The watery light. She met them silently,
And when they asked her name she answered,
 Stranger,
But told not who had brought her there or whence.
All knew a lady had been deep engaged
Through the whole day in secret with the king
And with the rustic lords who counselled him,
But none had seen her come or go. One said
There had been fluting in the morning wind
And stir of waters and a breeze that ran
Against the season's drift at touch of dawn
And strewed in the cool air a tingling music
Like fingers playing on a glass's rim.

One said that in her father's house at noon
 She had passed the coolest chamber where the
 light

Through the rush-woven hangings never came,
 And staying her bare feet by the shadowed entry
 Had seen pale radiance lying in a pool
 Upon the trodden floor, and faintly heard
 Her father's voice answering another voice
 That uttered, like a wind on ruffling water,
 Delicate syllables. And in truth there was
 A presence on the island all that day
 And all that night. The simple island lords,
 Who ruled a land as peaceful as themselves,
 Careful to have the granges full of corn,
 The goat-skins plump with wine, the flocks and
 herds

Guarded and tended to a due increase,
 Showed in their eyes, like a reflected light,
 Serenity, and in their bearing peace,
 And in their speech a cadence tranquil
 Than they had used before. Another told
 How the next day she had drowsed upon her bed
 About the dawn, poised between sleep and waking,
 And seen or dreamt (for when full morning came
 She knew not which) a rosy shape that drew
 Over the ripples to the sea's red verge,
 Couched in a rosy shell, with dolphin-teams
 And scaly-skinned outriders on the backs
 Of great sea-horses, blowing in resonant conches
 A deep-breath'd tune, like noise of boisterous
 waves

Which in full sunshine on a rocky coast
 Prolong their turmoil when the storm is done

And seem in play to mock their late arouse.
 While from her window these she watched, she
 heard

A crying from wild ocean rise in answer
 And saw the rosy shell fade in the dawn
 That flowered upon the sea. Or did a cloud,
 The sun's first messenger, dipped in his colours,
 Melt in his fiery breathing as he rose?
 And was that clamour only the first wind
 That moves at dawn and from the light-thrilled air
 Draws a faint melody? She did not know,
 For while she watched with elbows on the sill
 Sleep soothed her eyes again. She woke to find
 Sky, sea and light and air and nothing more,
 Save in her thoughts a half-forgotten dream.

The island Scyros floated on the sea
 And in the water shone her crags and towers,
 A second self existing in the wave,
 Mysterious and lovely, like the double
 Which, as some yet believe for comfort's sake,
 Attends each man from birth to death, remaining
 What in a kinder world he might have been.
 But few in Scyros were the flaws and scars
 Which the transmuting mirror-sea might smooth,
 And in that summer Thetis' blessing lay
 Especially upon her. Fishermen
 Thanked the sea-goddess for continual calm
 That lulled their storm-washed vessels near the
 rocks
 And herded in their nets the plenteous fish.
 The farmers watched their fields grow day by day
 More fruitful, and the vines under the sun

More prosperously ripen to the vintage,
 Unvexed by creeping rot or summer tempest.
 Nor wolf nor murrain did the shepherd plague
 And on his thyme-grown hills he slept at night,
 Close by the dew-pond's green and glimmering
 round,

While all about him slept the peaceful flock
 Like white stones under the distant, kindly stars.
 But not alone did the tame things increase
 For man's provision. In the dells and brakes
 The vines that bear the wild tart fruit grew heavy
 Early in summer, and along the ground
 Trailed with their load, not waving free in air.
 And for the maidens there were many flowers,
 Wild orchids rising in the broad-leafed grass
 And pale wood-lilies lighting all the hills
 And bells, as plenty as the ocean's fish,
 That seemed to run in shoals before the wind.
 These were the island's wealth and luxury
 Wherewith gay summer filled her spreaded skirts.

A constant weather shed bright influence
 Upon the life of man, and day by day
 The sea-wind blew unswerving, fresh and mild,
 And on his airy billows bore the clouds
 That sometimes melted in a fruitful shower.
 But never was the earth with moisture soaked
 To rot the full-eared corn in ripening month,
 Nor ever were the maidens from their tasks
 In field or garden or on tawny beach,
 Or from the games that followed the light task,
 By storms untimely or long rains withheld.
 There is in maidenhood a subtle strength

Reserved, as if a rift in mountains tall
Should catch the waters of a hasty spring
And hold them peaceful in her lap of stone
One moment, while the sky and leaning flowers
Are mirrored in the floods and make them lovely,
Before they hurry down the side again,
To grow, and take the soilure of their course,
Doing the work of water on the earth.

These that the island nourished needed not
A goddess' blessing on the year to make them
More beautiful, to round the child's thin limbs,
To ripen the lean side, and the slant breast
Curve out in fullness. They were nature's foison,
The flower on mankind's tree, as brief as fair,
The foam-wreath on the restless tide of life,
Whose bubbles rise and break and rise again,
As fugitive and as eternal they.

And who beheld them, youth or graybeard worn
Or child or nursing-mother, felt in them
The magic moment when the race of man
Poises in gathered strength before fulfilment
And turns to beauty. Not least lovely there,
The Stranger, tall of limb and bright of eye
And proud of carriage, joined them in their tasks,
Willing, and meek in answer when she earned
Reproaches of the quicker-handed girls,
And friendly in her looks, though on her brow
Cloudlike a constant sadness weighed, as if
Knowledge mixed there with wonder. In their
games

She was the better player. When they ran
With skirts trussed up she outran them easily,
And she was quicker with the tossing ball.

Even their youthful leader she outstripped,
Deidamia, daughter of the king,
Their fellow, though the daughter of the king,
And only by her beauty and her wit
The chief among them, who, till this the first
In race and game, was by the Stranger's mien
Of gentleness and friendliness so pleased
That earliest among them sprang her joy
To greet the new companion and to guide
Her steps unpractised in their well-known paths.
But after they had played one hour away
Suddenly fear possessed them, and they shrank
From touching her or being touched by her,
Compelled by what strange chastity they knew not,
So that a soberness upon them fell
And hushed their laughter, and their lifted arms
Bound to their sides and darkened their bright eyes.
It was as though a wandering god had plunged
Deep fathoms from his castle in the sky
Into earth's thicker air and flying slow
Had paused on shining-feathered vans to watch
So lovely a gathered garland of mortal flowers,
Which—as the shadow of the hawk afield
Frightens the birds to silence—so these maids
Stilled in their merriment and turned to marble.
The game was stayed. The lightly bouncing ball
Bounced into rest upon the sunny ground
And lay there motionless. The ring of girls
Stared each at other, dumbly asking whence
The influence came that thus affrighted them;
And none gave answer. Only in mockery
Echo among the hills drew slowly away,
Breathing soft repetitions of the laughter

That long had ceased. A heavy silence lay
Upon the plat of grass that late with sound
Bubbled and overflowed. Then one by one,
Each loosed her still and rigid attitude;
One bent her waist, and one the attentive head
Lowered, and one the stiffly pointing arm
Let flex again. But still the silence brooded
Over them all, as though they had been in truth
But rooted flowers, which have no other voice
Save what the winds and ever-voyaging bees
Create among their leaves. Thus from the depths
Of sense unconscious rose an airy thought
To warn them of a peril not yet seen
And nameless. But the Stranger gazed around
The troubled faces, hers grown darker still,
And raised her arms, as if imploring pity,
And slowly let them fall again. She saw,
One after one, the shadowed glances turn
And rest on her in mute distrust. Then she
Breathed deep a sigh of melody forlorn,
As sigh the woods when over darkening hills
Come the first streamers of a storm foreknown,
And to the nearest, grown within that hour
Her friend, who but that moment played with her
And with her made one moving form of grace,
Addressed her sole appeal, silent and wan,
Already hopeless. Deidamia gazed
Down on the grass with veiled, unanswering look,
As though the life and friendliness that played
But lately on her lips and in her eyes
Like a wild wood-thing to some secret hole
At sound of footsteps in the wood were gone.
Not to the rest the Stranger raised her eyes

But staring downward hid the unusual tears
And with a strangled gesture of her hands
Turned quick away. They saw her form recede
Among the olives, up the terraced hill,
The white skirt fluttering from step to step,
Climbing the zigzag path. Then, all confused,
Again they essayed the interrupted game,
Took up the idle ball and listlessly
Threw it from hand to hand. But as they played
The unknown influence that frightened them
Surged newly bodied from the troubled depths
Of maiden sense and trammelled their quick wrists
And hooded their clear eyes and in their thoughts
Dazzled like summer lightning faint and soft
That ripens the green corn on starry nights.

Meanwhile on furthest mountain out of sight
The young Achilles, stripped of maiden's dress,
Ran like a flame. Ant, spider, lizard, snake
Paused in their busyness among the rocks
To see him go. Along the narrow path,
Seldom by any trodden, overgrown
With spiky bramble and the stinging nettle
And binding trails of many a creeping flower,
He leapt unheeding and his naked limbs
Were coursed by rivulets of sweat and blood.
His teeth firm clenched, his nostrils open wide,
His eyes delighted by the wind he made,
He ran and ran untiring. Far below
The tiny people shrank to insect mould,
The sheltered harbour dwindled to a toy,
And soon the highest terraces of vines
Were left behind, and among burning crags

And suddenly the air was still and cool.
Below him far, a bird on bough unseen
Raised a night anthem in sweet jets of sound,
And further still, beyond the edge of foam,
A little boat, as little as a leaf,
Rocked on the falling swell, and from the bow
A kneeling fisherman dipped in the wave
His knotted line and watched, with back intent,
While his companion with slow-moving oar
Kept equal head against the gentle tide.

Thereafter, mild and grave and unaroused,
In female robes again the Stranger went
Among the maidens with averted head
And did her tasks with them but not resumed
The sweet companionship of race and game.
And long long day added to long long day
In summer's fragrant count. But all that year
The young in Scyros, like the trodden grass,
Which, when the heel is lifted, lifts again
A green untamèd head towards the sun,
Seeing thus by plenty life's oppressive heel
Raised for a season, raised themselves in joy
And stretched out greedy hands to pick the flower
That might not blow again. But so it was
That when the pot of pleasure came to boil
Youth turned to maid and with persuasive lips
Demanded what she gave not. She, aloof,
Passed by his prayer as though she heard it not,
And held in thought another, dimmer goal
Than such embraces as in earlier day
Herself and him begot. For each to each,
Working in pairs or resting through noon's heat

Or waking double-bedded on airless nights,
The maidens owned, stumbling and wanting
words,

How each was haunted by a misty shade,
Real but featureless. And, this confessed,
Each from her sister turned, repenting it,
To hide the blush that showed but chastity
And yet seemed full of shame. And each alone
Considered what her sister said, and dreamed
That better she could see, although not say,
The vision far removed. But in their dances
Ringed on the green and in their skipping games
A spirit ghosted them as not before
And turned them from the joys of human maids
To bodiless imaginings. They grew
All through that summer like a race apart,
Yet not the less fulfilled of grace and joy
Which unknown longing lit to deeper hue,
Like lightning playing in a distant cloud
Whose edges still are bright with sunset's rose.
No more by garden, hill or lonely shore
Deidamia led a romping train
To do their daily tasks or play or swim;
No more on island feast and holiday
She loosed them laughing in the happy crowd
To find new partners who their supple forms
In game or dance with rougher grip might hold
Yet not in arms less loving. When the ship
Out of the uncharmed world beyond the rim
Of visible ocean glided smoothly in,
Unlooked for but most welcome, and the people
Came down rejoicing to the waterside
And ringed about the unknown voyagers,

As naked as himself in joy he ran,
Till on the topmost rock where the last pine,
Scorched by the summer, by the winter gales
At every gust unsettled, grimly clings
To bare and dismal life, he paused and fell
Headlong upon the stone and felt its roughness
Pleasantly hot against his heated flesh.
Then he knew nothing but content. His blood,
That swept in race through every stretching vein,
Drowned the wild murmur of the lonely heart
With thunderous echoes in his bursting ears,
And the tired muscles of his youthful limbs
Ached keener as he lay than did the thoughts
That late perplexed his spirit. Soon, too soon,
The gasping breath grew calmer and the blood
Ran not so hastily. Thus on a night,
When loud gales shake the mountains and their
shouts

Ring on in tumult through the echoing arches
Of bursting heaven, no voice but theirs is heard;
But when they cease, when gradually the sky
Appeases her tempestuous children, then
Out of the spreading silence comes a voice
To take possession of the empty air,
The still complaining brook, from shelf to shelf
Falling in thin-toned misery which seems
To fill the listening world as not the storm.
Achilles wept. The sudden smarting tears
That sprang into his eyes astonished him;
And there, alone or watched by humble things
In whose pure spirits reason was not quick
To mock at grief, he let them fall unstopped
And eased his suffering. But when he looked

Down through the mist of olive-leaves and boughs
That clothed the mountain-side, the sea shone soft,
A smoky blue, whereon the sun's light glinted
And waves broke idly round a pointed reef.
Then on his knees he raised himself and stretched
Strong arms to the kind ocean, crying aloud,
"Mother, arise! Sweet mother, from the sea,
Where with thy flowers the swell is garlanded,
Arise and comfort me! Why was I born
To suffer thus in exile? Must I dwell
Far from my home among a foreign race
And exiled from myself in these false robes,
Kept from the emulations of my youth,
Its triumphs, sports and dangers, like a girl?
Truly the oracle has injured me,
Not only now in seeing my young death,
But first when it ordained that Peleus' son
Should have immortal substance in his flesh:
For who but one that hath unearthly power
Could make that possible which should not be
Or deceive any by so gross a trick?
Who but a goddess, moved by immortal wishes,
Could so mistake the human blood that runs
About my body, and my mortal wish
Thus by divine unpitying logic thwart?"
Thus, thus, he cried; and still no answer came,
And still his bosom rose rebelliously,
And still with angry glances gazed he out
Upon his mother's barren, lovely realm,
His mouth awry, his cheeks, 'twixt rage and
yearning,
Fiery or wet. At last behind his back
The sun dipped underneath a neighbour peak

And suddenly the air was still and cool.
Below him far, a bird on bough unseen
Raised a night anthem in sweet jets of sound,
And further still, beyond the edge of foam,
A little boat, as little as a leaf,
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The maids, withdrawn behind the shouting folk,
Like clouds indeed, ranked in the upper sky,
That in their bosoms hold the needed rain,
Aloof and lovely, wandered out of reach,
And like a summer cloud their shadow threw,
Cool but not dark upon the lively earth.
But soon to them, mustered beyond the throng,
Half hidden in the melting airs of day
That deepened towards night on land and sea,
There came a voice, a strange appealing voice,
That moved them inwardly they knew not how,
And with the rustle and sheen of spreaded stuffs
Thrown on the grass, and many a gem displayed,
Drew them to sidle through the crowd and view
The vessel's cargo. Long and long they gazed,
Charmed by the tongue that wove an airy web
About their spirits; and the Stranger too,
Drawn in among them, gazed with empty eyes
On robes and scarves, till on the growing pile
With careless hand and half-averted look
The merchant threw a sword. An ancient sword
Sank in a bed of softly yielding silks
And lay there darkly gleaming. On the blade
Old grooves left keen and sharp the shearing edge:
The hilt, by many a hand-grip worn and smooth,
Spoke the embrace of battling fingers clenched
Often in noble rage or the desperate
Frenzy of beaten men who dreaded death
Or the cold iron will of slayers set
Upon their fellows' end. These, like a swarm
Of ghosts that from the enchanter's eery glass
The unwary words call forth, rose from the blade
And steamed into the Stranger's smarting eyes,

So that her own stretched hand she could not see
Which the hilt drew towards it. But her flesh
Felt that compulsion in the tendons fine
And in her veins again the blood at war,
Desire with resolution, vow with wish,
Storming between the unused banks. And then,
Unwilling and regretted, the gesture made
Its own completion and an act was born,
Not ever from the world to be effaced
With all its consequence of deed and thought.
The hand that quickly from the hilt recoiled
Could never be the same again, the nerves
That henceforth should its fearful power direct
Were in their deep mysterious root transformed.
Nothing she cared who watched. Herself she saw
In her own spirit something rise and bud,
Suddenly swelling, and the sheath of dreams
Break into curling-up and withered leaves
To let that strange flower of the future through,
A blossom which with petals sombrely red
Presaged wild deeds, fruition of desire,
And after fruiting done a something else
Dark to foresee but heavy with a sense
Of weariness and blame and shame and tears.
This gloomed in her wide eyes and hid the scene,
Hid her companions, unawakened still,
Busy in dream with toy and ornament,
And hid the sideways glance that fixed on her
In triumph. Hardly, when that voice began
Low in her ear, like mutter of a stream
Heard by the night-bewildered wanderer
Deep in a misty wood, who knows the marsh
Deadly to straying feet—hardly she knew

Whence that doom-heavy soft persuasion came,
 From lips without or the unsuspected thought
 New-wakened in her heart with serpent-tongue,
 Calling the virgin spirit out of childhood
 To life and death and more than life or death.
 Dumbly she listened, but as one who looks,
 Not listens, with taut sense and straining eyes,
 Then with a muttered word, "To-morrow!" turned
 Towards the mountain, where the tumbled crags
 And huge still woods seemed in the darkening air
 To spread their darker selves and stain the sky
 With deeper hue about them. As she turned,
 She saw with outward sight, that nothing sees,
 Another glance beseeching her. It passed
 As fades the bird's quick shadow on the field
 When a cloud overtakes it. Through the people
 With stumbling feet and distant gaze she went.

This day was summer's harshest on the isle:
 Her breath lay heavy in the stubble field
 And field unreaped where stood the toppling ears
 And every vineyard where the clusters gloomed,
 Full-globèd shadows in the still-hung leaves;
 And every stone upon the shore rayed back
 Dull months-collected heat in stirless air
 Among the maidens. They about the show
 Still packed with swelling whispers and quick
 hands,
 And felt slow moisture down their bodies run,
 Stand on their foreheads and make lank their curls,
 Till one raised up her eyes, and on her cheek
 A faint breath smote with cold, awakening touch.
 Low her voice sounded in the hubbub soft

And yet so deep that each her whispering ceased
 And looked, and saw upon the sea's far edge
 The sunset like a wavering curtain hung
 To hide the unknown. Soft rose, smoky and soft,
 Spread out across the sky a melting scroll
 And underneath, a cloud, loose-edged and dim,
 Rode on the water. Thence the wind blew chill,
 Fingered their faces, pushed their tresses back
 And laid the airy garments cold and close
 Against their shivering and reluctant flesh.
 Away from them, alone, the Stranger paused
 High on the shoulder of the stony hill,
 And looking eastward as they west, beheld
 At vision's limit, poised in crystal air,
 The phantom of a mountain-range, whose base
 Sprang out of vapour, but whose floating peaks
 Threw back in broken gold the sun's last light.
 Dazzled she stood and stared. The mountains swam
 Like rainbowed ice afloat on Arctic seas,
 Impalpable, but sharp of edge and colour,
 One moment, and the next dissolved in shade,
 Gone like a glowing cloud that winds disperse;
 And darkness from that first drowned point came
 on,
 Hurrying on to cover all the world.

Again Achilles laid upon the rock
 His maiden garments, now with sad contempt
 Yet something new of sorrow in the touch
 That needlessly made smooth their tumbled folds.
 Then, like the rising of the winter sun,
 Burning but sullen-hued, out of pale clouds,
 The hero's body rose, from that eclipse

For ever freed. Now up the deep ravines
That clove the mountain, and the hollow paths
That scaled her flanks, flowed darkness like a tide
And the long grass streamed out invisibly
Like seaweed under the slow-swelling wave.
Far from the fitful lights and voices loud
Achilles came with heavy lagging step
Up the ascent. His feet the pollen brushed
From pale, night-waking flowers and murmured on
Through weeds by summer's heat made harsh and
dry,

As though earth's spirit in the stillness breathed
A nervous deep unrest. Heavy he trod
And paused at every turning of the path
And took the next step upward with a sigh.
And often as he went he looked behind
As though in quivering bough and air-tossed leaf
Were whispers of an unknown follower.
But closer still thought's dark pursuers came,
Spirits new waking and agog to form
Themselves strong bodies from the smoking blood
His hand was now to spill, and from his own
That after must be spilt. At last he stayed
Under an olive-tree and sinking down
Bowed his hot forehead into cramped hands,
Feeling a little world whose pulses beat
Like earthquakes or annihilating wars.
About his seat the creatures of the night
Sought each a weaker, and the ancient rocks
Saw many a scene of tiny battle and death.
After an hour was gone he raised his head,
Hearing, he thought, once more below the crag
The quiet water washing on a reef

Which in the silence grew, until it seemed,
Close in his ear, but in no human tongue,
A gentle voice speaking strange words of peace.
"Mother," he cried, "it is your voice. O, use
The speech I know!" No answer came to him:
But when the echoes of his cry had fallen
Like stricken birds from dark crag to dark sea,
He spoke again: "Mother, was it from this
You hid me, not my own longings, my own dreams?
These were the deeds I dreamt of—to make cause
With the shrill cuckold for the magic harlot
And slay innocent men! Now I can see
What it is that must die before my death,
Eaten at the root before the arrow strikes.
I cry to you as not before, for then
I accused the kind, unknowing deity
That saw the motions of my human heart
As I have watched the toad's dull pulsing throat
In ignorance and love. Now I implore
Your strength against the thing you feared for me!
For this dark fate that points out the forked way
Loves not nor hates, but knows, and in my brain
Has sown a dreadful guessing. Shall I become
An airy bubble, empty, round and gay,
That leaves not even a stain upon the earth,
Or the gross meat which day by day my fellows
Pass through dishonouring stomachs for their food?
How should I choose between them if I must?
Yet as I speak my choice is made." The sea,
Moaning about the eternal base below,
Spread through the air a voice of sad assent
That gripped his heart and in the grip gave peace,
The peace of things resolved, not to be changed.

Deep grew the darkness where he stood. The moon,
Arising softly from a couch of cloud,
Lightened the hill-side here and there, and cast
On every shadowed place a thicker shade.
Within that veil Achilles stood obscured,
Numb at the heart, but all Achilles now,
For now from him a last enchantment fell,
Leaving him strong and sad. Out of the world
Faded at last the semblance he had borne,
Vanished as vanishes a happy dream
Which at the menace of inbreaking day
Still shields the sleeper from the cruel sun.
Gone was the Stranger. Whither? Ask as well
Where the flower's beauty goes when petals fade
And the rough seed thrusts out. Yet it may be
That still a spirit haunts the isle, a ghost
Of dew and light and air, revisiting
The beach where long ago the maidens played,
And finds perhaps in some far, narrow vale
The rude grave of a poet, dead too young,
Whom death, or life, frustrated of his hope,
Presses her faint lips to the soil and breathes
One word of half-remembered sisterhood.
But these are dreams. Out of the breathing world
Long, long ago that semblance fled away,
Past any summons, even of the sweetest mouth
To which it once had answered. Now in vain
Those patient feet climbed the rough path, in vain
Deidamia through the olive-trees,
A slip of white that dimly drifted on
Like sunshine pale in sea-abysms drowned,
Searched groping and astray. In vain she called,
Bidding the lost companion answer her—

Too late the summons spoken to a wraith.
Yet a receding whisper trembled out
As though the air had spoken or the leaves
Had lent a voice to the unbodied spirit
To breathe an inarticulate farewell.
Gladly she answered and again came on
And by the darkness where the hero stood,
Only a shadow paler than the rest,
Troubled that shadow with her gentle plea:
"Why do you shun us, Stranger? Have we not
Long since repented, though in looks not words,
The wrong we did you? We were cruel and strange,
Knowing not why, not knowing we were so,
But moved by something hidden in ourselves
That never stirred before. It was not unkindness
Turned me from you and soured my friendly heart
But kindness too sudden in my breast. O, say,
What serpent raised its head 'twixt you and me
And stung the hands held out in growing love?"
She paused, and in her voice the tears welled high
Like an encroaching wave that fails again
Before the brink. "Why are you strange to us?
What wakes in us a thing so long unknown
To sudden aching life? Before you came
We lived together, maidens without thought,
As though the rolling world its axle stayed
And time forebore to trouble us. But now
The emblems of our dream grow real and harsh,
Our peace becomes a smarting restlessness.
Return to us, return, and we with games
And gentle love will woo you to ourselves
And all shall be with us as once it was.
Will you not come with me? Can you not give

Again what I at first refused?" He stood
As rigid as a cypress-tree at noon
When all the mountain sleeps and on her side
The woods are breathless. Then with painful cry
At one step from the thicket he advanced
And in the moonlight tall and naked appeared,
Saying with harsh, loud voice, "I am Achilles!"
Whereat the girl moaned low, shrinking aside,
And all life's terror flickered in her gaze.
He bent his straining body down to her,
She winced away still more on powerless knees,
And thus they stayed unmoving. The night stilled
Her wandering airs and every jiggling leaf
Hung quiet on the stalk. Nothing was heard,
Save from the girl a deep and labouring breath
That broke into a sob and died away
And left a quivering horror in the darkness
When silence rose about the frozen pair.
Until at last Achilles spoke again,
Like thunder speaking on the cloudy hill
To dwellers in the valley far below,
Distant, deliberate and dreadful. "You
Shrink now from truth as once from lies. I have
looked
Truth in the face and seen a fearful thing,
Not what we think—yet I am not afraid."
He ceased. Again the echo died. The girl
Raised her sunk face with wrung and questioning
look,
As though upon his breast was written a word,
Where the hard answer to all questions lay,
Which she spelt slowly out. Upon her brow
The weight of unexpected knowledge grew

As hard a weight to carry as may be
 In mortal womb the progeny of a god.
 Yet never did the proud and stem-straight neck
 Sway at the burden; and in those wide eyes
 Horror gave way to wonder, wonder drew in
 A sharp and dolorous ecstasy. At last
 He, bending down, another answer read
 To his own cry. There was in their embrace
 No kindness nor no pleasure, but the strength
 Of floods unloosened, as their spirits rose
 Dizzy and blind through the void fields of night.
 O stars, shine kindly on them, and, dark earth,
 Breathe all your thick and friendly odours up
 About their bed, the smell of well-dunged fields
 Ready to bear new harvests and the smell
 Of cattle stalled in comfortable byres,
 Mixed with the keener scents of transient flowers,
 That drift, a natural incense, on the hills;
 And you, dim forest on the mountain side,
 Receive among the noises of the night
 That cry of bodily pain and let it fall
 Into the silence with the fox's bark
 And scarce-heard whimper of the netted hare.

When the slow morning came, the crawling sun
 Appeared behind a heavy bank of cloud
 And threw a gray and level flood of light
 Towards the island; and the hero's arm
 Threw a distincter shadow on the breast
 That panted soft beneath it into peace.
 He raised himself a little, and with voice
 That dawn's mysterious hush made thin and
 still

Murmured, "The night is over, I must go!"
Then with convulsive grasp of his strong arms
He raised her to him, and his anxious mouth
Sought on her quiet lips, cold cheeks, dark lids,
A further tenderness night had not shown.
He found not what he sought, or, if he found,
Found also in that sweet such bitter taste
As checked the crowding kisses. Through his
tears

That ached unshed he saw her resting body
Blurred with unsteady light. He closed his eyes
And in his heart wild lamentation rose,
A jarred and dissonant music that bewailed
Their two defeated lives. O, for the world
Of dreams and unawaked enchantment still!
Already on her smooth brow and lineless cheeks,
Forewritten in a ghostly character,
Age, sorrow and deception and the shame
Of hopes forsaken grinned at him. He knew,
His loth flesh crawling at the touch, that now
The hateful pencil wrote upon his skin
Its mocking message—not the same, for age
Had no part in it. This was truth indeed,
Which he had seen, he boasted, without fear,
But dim and veiled, not in particular shape.
He winced unbearably, his spirit felt,
Grinding and harsh, the stirring of that truth,
Too like the pangs of motherhood which soon
Deidamia's body must convulse,
Being to her then, deserted and alone,
The sole remembrance of this night, their love.
He groaned, but at the sound she raised her
eyes,

Answering him only with a long, slow look
Deep in his own, which gazed at her and shed
Their burning hunger and unrest, until
They mirrored pure the mournful peace of hers,
The peace of things fulfilled, deep beyond joy.

EPILOGUE

How many sailors in how many ships
Have lifted questing sail on what wide seas
To find the islands of the blest, where dwell
The kings whom earth remembers gratefully
Because they raised a little from her breast
The base and struggling children of her love
And made her dust a little more than dust!
How many sails in what deep seas have drowned,
Seeking the islands of the blest where yet
No fortunate explorer dropped his line,
Sounding the channel to that haven still!
For thence no sailor yet has come to tell
How on a day his ship the landfall made
And how the crew set foot on smiling shore
To taste the bounty of the fruitful isles.
No sailor yet in taverns by the sea
Taught any other how to set a course
And find again the islands of the blest.
Dim in blue distances they gleam and drown
Beyond the sight of ships, and there in peace
Achilles reigns, cleansed from the soils of life,
A bright and radiant spirit as he was
Ere life began for him, and there he wields
His now untarnished sceptre. Far away
They lie from all attainment, save in sleep,
His in the chartless oceans of the mind.

May Day, PORTOFINO—Christmas Day, LEWES, 1920

1922-1924

WOODLAND SCENE

Run on, young rivulet, to no river going,
Though Thames here sucks the pap, thou
feed'st him not;

So slender is thy trickle that its flowing
Stirs not the bramble-leaves that in it rot.

Yet in the stream my hand may paddle and make
Islands and dams to break or pen the flood,
Or with a broken branch's rough end rake
New channels two inches deep in sticky mud.

High up the bank among the trees she lies
On bloomless violets and primroses,
And to the shy woodpecker's shrill surprise
Sings, laughing, scraps of mournful melodies.

"The Earl of Moray" and "The Unquiet Grave"—
The sun makes gaudy chequers on her dress:
Faint through her cheerful voice the old sorrows
rave,
So far and faint they sound like happiness.

Further along the bank the terrier scuffles,
Yaps through the undergrowth in blundering
haste,
Stands at the burrow's mouth and barks and
snuffles,
Calling the rabbits to come out and be chased.

Now is the channel garnished for a yard:

The last note sounded, she pauses with a smile:

The dog above the burrow stands on guard:

All three are happy for this little while.

WOMAN'S SONG

No more upon my bosom rest thee,
Too often have my hands caressed thee,
My lips thou knowest well, too well.
Lean to my heart no more thine ear
My spirit's hidden truth to hear
—It has no more to tell.

In what dark night, in what strange night,
Burnt to the butt the candle's light
That lit our room so long?
I do not know. I thought I knew
How love could be both sweet and true,
I also thought it strong.

Where has the flame departed, where
Amid the waste of empty air
Is that which dwelt with us?
Was it a fancy? Did we make
Only a show for dead love's sake,
It being so piteous?

No more against my bosom press thee,
Ask no more that my hands caress thee,
Leave the sad lips thou hast known so well.
If to my heart thou lean thine ear,
There, grieving, thou wilt only hear
Vain murmuring of an empty shell.

FAREWELL

WHAT was it entered on the air this morning,
Rattled the window, touched my sleeping face
And woke me suddenly with vague, sweet warning
Of something new along these muddy ways?

I must go out into the fields and wander,
Whither I care not. Maybe I shall find
Over the next brown hedge the eternal yonder,
Which like a coloured shadow haunts the mind.

Over the hedge the far hill mounteth steeply
And on its side the trees are black and dead;
Above, the crystal blue recedeth deeply,
Whence float the great white cloud-shapes
overhead.

Under the furthest cloud that now appears,
Beyond the hill, there lies another vale,
Where late the cloud hath dropt her gentle tears
And April shadows wander, quick and pale.

And there already, so it seems, the boughs
Are sparkling with half-opened buds, the sun
Is spilt among the undergrowth and glows
Kindly on spring so early-sweet begun.

Here, in the place we know, dark winter lingers,
The ground within the grove is cold and wet;
The wind around these walls with icy fingers
Gropes for our shrinking hearts and finds them
yet.

Here we were never happy. Here we said:
To-morrow Spring will come and set us free—
Sighed it at rising and on going to bed
Searched the dumb dark for signs of ecstasy.

Little we knew, year after year were cheated,
Saw doubting what was not, hoped for release,
Found all our signs and omens uncompleted
And sought at last in living death our peace.

But for us both beckoned the eternal yonder
Over the next brown hedge. You whom I loved,
We both, but not together now, must wander,
In search of that far happiness unproved.

A LONELY PLACE

THE leafless trees, the untidy stack,
Last rainy summer raised in haste,
Watch the sky turn from fair to black
And watch the river fill and waste.

But never a footstep comes to trouble
The rooks among the new-sown corn
Or pigeons rising from late stubble
And flashing lighter as they turn.

Or if a footstep comes, 'tis mine,
Sharp on the road or soft on grass:
Silence divides along my line
And shuts behind me as I pass.

No other comes, no labourer
To cut his shaggy truss of hay,
Along the road no traveller,
Day after day, day after day.

And even I, when I come here,
Move softly on, subdued and still,
Lonely as death, though I can hear
Men shouting on the other hill.

Day after day, though no one sees,
The lonely place no different seems,
The trees, the stack, still images
Constant in who can say whose dreams?

THE WIND

Blow colder, wind, and drive
My blood from hands and face nearer the heart.
Cry over ridges and down tapering coombs,
Carry the flying dapple of the clouds
Over the grass, over the soft-grained plough,
Stroke with your violent hand the hill's rough hair
Against its usual set.

Snatch at the reins in my dead hands and push me
Out of the saddle, blow my labouring pony
Across the track. You only drive my blood
Nearer the heart from face and hands and plant
there,

Slowly burning, unseen, but alive and wonderful,
A numb, confusèd joy!

This little world's in tumult. Far away
The dim waves rise and wrestle with each other
And fall down headlong on the beach. And here
Quick gusts fly up the funnels of the valleys
And meet their raging fellows on the hill-tops,
And we are in the midst.

This beating heart, enriched with the hands' blood,
Stands in the midst and feels the slow joy burn
In solitude and silence, while all about
The gusts clamour like living, crying birds
And the gorse seems hardly tethered to the ground.
Blow louder, wind, about

My square-set house, rattle the windows, lift
The trap-door to the loft above my head
And let it fall, clapping. Yell in the trees
And throw the rotted oak-bough to the ground,
Flog the dry trailers of my climbing rose—
Make deep, O wind, my rest!

RIDING ON THE DOWNS

STAND still a moment and listen. Cannot you hear
A strange sound in the wind that whips at our
faces?

Like drums and trumpets playing, now far, now
near

—But why should a band come into these empty
places?

Or how could we hear drums from the valley
towns?

They are much too far. It must be the threshing
air

Plunging mad in the hollow folds of the downs,
Like a panicking beast whose leg is caught in a
snare.

It is nothing. Ride on. And yet there again it went!
In that last blast which volleyed so overhead,
Brassy and resonant music, now faint and spent,
Now silent again as the sudden gust falls dead.

Ride on, ride on. Let us find a place that is still:
Down by the stacks to the bottom lead the way.
Hark! once more above us the airy trumpets thrill
—Who knows what other riders are out to-day?

SONNET

YOUR heart burns into mine, mine into yours,
As do the cold, unmoving elements
When to their joy the chemist's will consents
And from that flame some residue endures.
Time and the world may part us—but what
ensures

Earth's truest, holiest beauty? Sunrise burns,
But the enflamèd vapour soon returns
To pallid air, and wisdom love soon cures.

Nothing is lost. Time's the same moment still.
Years may revolve and all we know may change,
New loves your heart and mine, inconstant, fill,
For time and the world will ever leave us free
For grief and joy—but, far as our lives may range,
What has been is, and cannot cease to be.

IN THE ORCHARD

THE cherry, hardly paler than the sky,
Lifts white-encrusted branches:
The old mulberry, crouching like an animal,
Puts on new leaves again.

Gently the ivory petals of the pear
Rise in the wind and fall.
The milky light spreads everywhere and makes
No shadows in the orchard.

The trees are dumb, their swaying laughs at me,
And voices not their own
Come from the wind-shaken leaves. This is but
music:
It is not the trees that speak.

Like the eyes of a woman with child, their looks
are proud
And beautiful and unthinking:
They have in them the strength of a million years.
Untouched by any thought.

Already now behind the glistening petals,
Slowly grow round and hard
The fruit which will, within the sugary pulp,
Hold the immortal seed.

The spirit of the season lingers here;
Her shadow falls across
My listless hand stretched out on the tepid earth.
My heart trembles with longing.

My love is like a tree that blossoms duly,
When comes her season round:
Spirit, if aught thou heedest the prayers of men,
Grant to my love a child.

THE FOUNTAIN IN THE PINE FOREST

FAR off among those woods it rises
More than a thousand miles from here:
Some other eye it now surprises,
Its rustling soothes another ear.

The woods each side were black and silent,
The roads were dusty and blinding white:
Down it, as down a narrow funnel,
Came in full stream the noonday light.

The cart swayed over stone and rut:
Huddled in hot, unhappy doze
I drowsed along with eyes half shut,
Desiring only the journey's close.

But suddenly we lurched and turned
And, round the corner, bright and thin
And cool in the sullen trees, there burned
That fountain! And my breath drew in.

I woke and spoke, hushed in surprise.
They did not hear. The cart went on.
Still the glare dazzled in our eyes,
The wheels ground harsh on rut and stone.

FOUNTAIN IN THE PINE FOREST 355

Again we lurched and turned a corner.
Laughing, the driver shook his rein
And shouted something that went by me:
I sank in my hot sleep again.

Far off among those woods it rises
More than a thousand miles from here:
Some other eye it now surprises,
Its rustling soothes another ear.

How far away in time and distance
Is that bright fountain left behind!
Day after day its glimmering image
Fades in the forests of the mind.

A WOMAN, A DOG, AND A WALNUT TREE

LONG did I beat my walnut tree,
The nuts that fell were few and bad;
I dare not beat my dog, for he
Can look at me with eyes too sad.

You, Doris, then? But if I do
From your half-opening lips will fall
Soft bursts of laughter, sweet and true,
And mocking as the cuckoo's call.

For though no changing wind can miss you,
In this at least you constant prove,
Whether I storm at you or kiss you
You mock my anger and my love.

So I will kiss you still or beat you,
Since it can make no difference;
Nor to be grave do I entreat you,
Your laughter is my recompense.

WOMEN AND HORSES

WHILE I was saddling her she tried to bite me
A dozen times, and now I'm hardly mounted
And feeling for the stirrup, she wants to fight me.

Look there! with rapid sideways steps uncounted
She tried to brush me off against that wall,

And now she shies and plunges, bucks and rears:
She feels her oats, my pony, that is all,

There's nothing, not even me, she hates or fears.
We missed that lorry by a half an inch,

She hopes to get her head across the stubble:
Bless you, you'd think she felt the girth-straps pinch:

That's not the trouble, though we shall have
trouble.

But when we're on the turf I'll let her go
And she'll be happy then and I shall too.

No wonder in her stable she found it slow,
But if I'd left her there, I ask you who

Would have complained the more? She wants to
run

And doesn't want it, since I want her to;
And playing up is what she thinks is fun,

Until on turf there's something better to do.
Come up, my darling, damn you! Steady, now,

Or else we shan't get anywhere to-day:
We'll go with delicate steps around the plough

And then we're on the grass, and then away!

THE EXCUSE

· LOVERS allege of ladies whom they love
Beauty or virtue or most noble thought,
And with ingenious arguments they prove
Why they have chosen, who perhaps were
caught.

No one of these excuses fits my mind
But this, no doubt, will serve as well as any—
In all things, and ourselves as well, we find
The same reasons for laughter, and so many.

THE LUCKY DAY

(Gliding competitions on Itford Hill, October 21, 1922)

COME down, beloved, from the crowded hill:
The darkening air grows chill,
Though still the man-bird sways from spur to spur
Triumphant in the dusk, and still below
The motor-horns applaud with harsh hurray.
We have seen Fokker going to and fro
His patient hundred yards of conquered air
And still at every turning halt and sway:
We have seen Raynham slide
A mile before the wind and slip and fall:
We have seen spurred by all
The wind's invisible and nervous side.
And now away—
The last jog homeward ends our holiday.
Kick Polly's ribs and come. The hill-side way
Gives us a slow and careful journey down.
Come, now you see
Far off the crowned lights of the distant town
Beckon us home to stable and to tea.

Love loves the lucky, so they say,
And I have had my luck to-day,
Seeing you when I thought we had said good-
bye.

To-morrow I am going away
But this last luck new knots will tie
In the handkerchief of your memory.

I do not trust you yet
Not to forget,
But better I should go and take my chance.
It is thought that absence sometimes may enhance

The lover's gifts for whomso he may love,
And that his image more may move
Her mind than presence or than bold advance
Of speech or touch. So think I not, but now
To-morrow with an easier heart I go,
Luck having blessed me,
Though, on this hill's open and crowded brow,
Only luck has kissed me.

We have seen Raynham slide
A mile before the wind and slip and fall,
And also, side by side,
Maneyrolle and Gray,
Against a darkening and a stormier day,
Ride out the sudden squall.
These men, in love with air, though who knows
why,
Trust luck to see them through the enterprise
And in their risk discover ecstasy,
Being better lucky than wise.
As they on unknown currents fall and rise,
So I on luck or on your favour,
Both as unknown to science, as uncharted

As the wild air's behaviour,
Will stake, glad-hearted,
All that I am or may be, all that is I.

Love loves the lucky, so they say,
And luck has been my friend to-day. . . .

RESOLVE

SWEET, on your lips the seal is broken,
The airy seal my lips set there,
Another mouth has brushed the token
Away into its parent air.

Once I reproached you with unkindness
When I adored: you now I find,
Awaking from my six months' blindness,
Unkind to me but still too kind.

Shall I then damn you or forgive you,
Whom I to faith can never charm?
With proud or humble gesture leave you,
Or kiss again and think no harm?

I have known love and thrice or more
Has beauty on my pleading smiled,
For one or two my heart was sore
And one I loved was a fairy's child.

Fairies are neither good nor evil
But strange: they follow different laws.
Fool that I was in her to level
Human effect and fairy cause!

With that deception sick and spent
I wept alone but now I see
She was, though wide her footsteps went,
Faithful to love if not to me.

So are you not. Or have you known,
Unknown to me, that grinding pain,
The slow fire in the aching bone,
The fierce worm in the sleepless brain?

All a long night I cried for you
And in the morning I was healed:
With the first lonely gleam I knew
A peace assured though unrevealed.

Leave me my peace, and what you can
Give me. I ask no more of you
Than what you give to any man
—And this, alas! I always knew—

Compliance equalling desire,
The willing hands, the lips not grudged
And the eyes' soft consenting fire
—I judge not, let me not be judged!

Make we no more vows to be broken,
Leave to its proper use the air!
Sweet, on your lips I set no token
But only seek the sweetness there.

THE SNOW CLOUD

WE climb the well-remembered track,
Lively our beasts, our spirits dull:
Two-thirds the sky with cloud is black:
With jerking shoulders the ponies pull.

The air is sharp, and high in air,
Mountain, chasm and gully, stand
The bleak dark snow clouds, and we stare
Silent over the wintry land.

And over the empty hill we go
Through waves and waves of lightless grass
That dumbly wait the high-hung snow
Or this bare shrivelling cold to pass.

Still neither speaks. O, we have changed.
Our silence then was charged and deep,
And hand in hand in thought we ranged
Along the coomb and up the steep,

Where then in the heat the ponies slackly
Trod the dry grass with heads hung low,
Where now the cold cloud towering blackly
Whips at their blood and makes them go—

Not ours! For our cold hearts are dumb

Nor answer each the other's call.

Can love again from these hearts come?

From that black cloud will white snow fall?

THE BITTEN GRASS

How coldly I survey
This windless corner in the bleached and wintry
 gorse
Which was our shelter once, day after day.
But now my horse
Is halted here by habit, not the rein,
And here we stay,
I dreaming coldly back, he reaching for the grass,
In him no hunger and in me no pain,
But in us both desires that idly pass.
How sluggish is the beast, he will not move,
How sluggish is my heart that has outgrown its
 love!

So short a time, four seasons have not gone—
This, if my heart forgets, my eye must know.
Grass does not grow
In autumn or in winter: till the sun
Comes overhead again, there still shall be
These white, dry, bitten stalks to testify
That here long summer mornings we would lie
While the ponies grazed beside us peaceably.
These bitten stalks, a circle eaten dry
And trampled down, this was our shelter, this
Was where you drew me down, begging another
 kiss.

SPRING, MY SPRING

THIS year on spring's first day I came
At ten o'clock to ride with you
And while you saddled up I felt
That strange sweet fire in the air again.

Dizzy I sat my quiet horse
Who indolently stirred his hooves,
Striking upon the bricks of the yard,
Sharp sounds in that too honeyed air.

Through my brain the season fell,
Wreathing like milk dripped into water:
I sat motionless and drugged,
Remembering a dozen springs.

Spring, my Spring, O ride with me,
Thou unattainable, ghostly thing,
And leaning from the saddle give me
Your cool and ghostly, fleeting kiss.

SONNET

THERE is something in us, not within our power,
Released when our two spirits clash, as now
We see the escaping sands of this swift hour
Trickling towards our fate and wonder how
This Genie from his hidden vessel came
To shadow up our sky and hide away
The love that burnt, a pure and constant flame,
Between our hearts and minds but yesterday.
Now like two children with a common fear
We link cold hands and wait to see the end,
Having neither will nor power to interfere,
Knowing none on whom to call, or God or friend,
Since our own selves have failed us and we stand
Helpless till this strange power has shown its hand.

SONNET

THE world has so much pain that who would add
The last least pang to it? O dearest child,
If from this silence I emerge not mad,
Passion controlled and heart no longer wild,
Shall I reproach you for having made of me
Another man, who can feel this pain no more?
Must you too suffer, because reluctantly
You dragged the scab off the half-healing sore,
And in that violence killed the nerve that feels
The torments of unvalued love? I know
That in this week may come the day that steals
From youth his last response to joy or woe;
And when I live again the I then dead
Will bless from Limbo-shades your innocent head.

THE SHADOWGRAPH

I PLAY a game that children play,
Tracing your shadow on the wall;
But on the wall the shadows stray,
As the wood-flames flare and fall.

Your image lies there quiet now
A moment. Quickly—I can draw
The profile, chin, mouth, nose, and brow
And close-coiled hair. But what I saw,

Ere half the line is traced, has gone:
The pencil must begin anew,
And all so eagerly begun
But wastes the wall with scrawls untrue.

Until at last the lamp is brought,
The game is done, and now I see
The tangled scribble I have wrought
Grimacing at me mockingly.

SONG

THE sun dwells in the shoot,
The bud, the flower, the fruit,
And the ripe fruit may be won.
We in our hands can hold
The apple's glowing gold,
We can possess the sun.

But, though one plead or weep,
Yourself you safely keep
From love's alarms and harms—
A fleeting light-spot, thrown
From a mirror by the sun,
Which brightens but not warms.

THE HAUNTING

THE owl that lives in a hole in the oak
Need fear no more for your prying hand,
That once on his daytime slumber broke
In a game he never could understand.

You and I will go together no more
And, setting our hands to the clock's loud
chime,
Strike four o'clock at twenty to four
That the village may live by a fancied time.

The apples will hang on the drooping bough
And you will not pluck at them as you pass:
You never come down the pathway now
Leading your pony out to grass.

You are gone from there and I could not stay
In a place where ever I seemed to see
A ghost that slipped through the winter day
Too quickly to stop and speak to me.

For the ghosts of the living walk, I know,
More often than those of the peaceful dead.
Have I not through those alleys seen you go,
A tall slim girl with a proud, small head?

If I walk, a ghost, in the garden yet,
In the ghost of *our* garden let it be,
With last year's rain may the lawns be wet,
And spirits of leaves on a phantom tree.

Let the sap of the wounded sumach bleed
Where we broke the boughs last year to pass,
Let the poppy rattle her dried-up seed
And last year's fir-cones lie on the grass.

This year I know not, I will not know
If new flowers bloom for the voyaging bee,
If here the bushes more thickly grow
Or there a sapling is sprung to a tree.

There must be no change. If I found a change
Then the phantom-I might find you there,
Not a ghost, but the new year's you and strange,
And the last year's you not anywhere.

SONNET

HE who so long a shadow contemplated
(The storm being done, a long-stilled voice hath
said)

Finds himself in the end with a shadow mated
And, quick though it move, a shadow is but dead.
We love not women but the images
Ourselves have made of Beauty, Kindness, Youth:
Vain shapes that any candle throws may please
Till unexpected movement tells the truth.

It was not you I loved, it was not you!
It was your beauty was the flickering fire
That, on the wall I watched so eagerly, threw
A gibing shadow of my own desire.
But, should I now to the real woman turn,
Might true love of that first true sight be born?

TO THE UNIMploRED BEloVED

REMAIn, for me, chaste, unapproached, unstirred,
Never from me shall you hear any word

Asking that you should give me what I give.
To-day I speak to you, but even to-day
You shall not know it is you to whom I say,
I love you and shall love you while I live.

Once in these years my lips have touched your lips:
O will-benumbing sweetness!—so one sips

Timidly a magic, an immortal wine,
Too strong for human bodies, only to try,
Saying that if I die one can but die,
But if I live that dangerous joy was mine.

Now move no footstep from your place, do not
Repeat that moment, nor by any jot

Of speech, or touch of hand, or glance of eye
Show to me any more than common kindness,
But go your lovely way in lovely blindness,
You the still seen, the enraptured seër I.

For gathered flowers go limp, bright-dusted wings
Of handled butterflies grow shabby things,

The mistress once enjoyed becomes a woman
—Attentive, kindly, comforting, too near,
Till what was magic is no more than dear—
So, knowing I am, I will not think you human.

376 TO THE UNIMploRED BEloVED

Some men love beauties they have found in books
Or who from pictures with unfading looks

Gaze out upon this changing fading life.

I, you—and thus; and I would have you be
Ever the same and still remote from me,

Only an image, neither lover nor wife.

DARK HELEN

DARK Helen! phantom from my own blood
steaming,
There never sleeping, absent never long,
Thy ominous tresses on the night air streaming
Still wake the old wars and that embroiling wrong!
Still launchest thou the fleet of doomed desires
And fliest on before them to destroy
The fated walls of an eternal Troy,
New risen in my heart from the old fires.
The armies of longing muster at thy call
And while camp-followers feast, the heroes fall,
And the slow rivers are quickened with blood, and
again
Achilles, Paris, Hector in me are slain—
The brave, the beautiful, the faithful, all!

THE BEGGAR'S RIDE

To my Wife

CHARACTERS

The KING

LEO, Chancellor of the Kingdom

The TREASURER

The ARCHBISHOP

The PREFECT OF THE CITY

ANDREW, Leo's Clerk

AARON, a Merchant

DAVID, Aaron's Son

JACOB, a Beggar

A PEASANT

A SERVANT

HELENA, Leo's Daughter

NURSE

SOLDIERS, CITIZENS and BEGGARS

The scene is laid in and near the capital of a small Christian kingdom in Hither Asia. The time is a century or so before the capture of Constantinople by the Turks. The decoration and costumes must suggest chiefly the Byzantine, with a marked trace of the eastern and the barbaric. The action covers the period from early one morning until after midnight of the following day.

FIRST SCENE

The public square outside the Royal Palace. The gateway of the palace is on the left. Other buildings at the back and to the right. CITIZENS are crowding in, shouting confusedly as they run.

A VOICE (*panting*): What is it? What are they running for?

SECOND VOICE: News!

VOICES: News! News from the front!

THIRD VOICE: A messenger from the army rode into the palace half an hour ago.

VOICES: What is the news? Tell us! What is it?

THIRD VOICE: My little boy saw him. His horse was almost foundering. He rode in great haste. His clothes were torn, and his face was covered with dust.

A VOICE: Bad news! Bad news! His wounds were dripping blood.

ANOTHER VOICE: The army is routed. The Turks are coming.

VOICES (*all shouting clamorously at the palace*): Come out and give us the news!—What has happened?—Come out!—All to your houses!—Where is the Chancellor? Where is the King?—The Chancellor! the Chancellor!—Leo! Leo! Leo!

A VOICE: Go to the walls. We must die upon the walls.

SECOND VOICE: It is good news!

VOICES: What?—What is he saying?

OTHER VOICES: What?—Shut him up!—Don't listen to him.—Silence, optimist!

As the shouting grows louder and more confused, a group of men comes out of the palace. It consists of the KING, LEO, followed by DAVID and ANDREW, the ARCHBISHOP, the TREASURER, and the PREFECT. LEO advances a few steps and holds up his hand for silence. The crowd ceases, with a last despairing wail of "Tell us the news!"

LEO: There is news from the Army. I am commanded by the King's Majesty to tell you that yesterday a great battle was fought. (*He pauses.*)

A VOICE (*ecstatically*): It is good news!

There is laughter, some of it a little hysterical

LEO: The battle began early in the morning, under the mountains. There were few of us and many of them. For an hour it went hard with our brave soldiers. Then the standards of Christ prevailed, and the Turks were routed and fled into the hills. All night our men pursued them, and to-day there is not one living Turk on the soil of our land. The city is delivered from its peril.

VOICES: Hurray!—Good news!—Good news!—Three cheers for Leo!—Three cheers for the King!—Hurray! Hurray!

A VOICE: Who brought the news? Let us cheer him.

A VOICE: Go to the walls. We must die upon the walls.

SECOND VOICE: It is good news!

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A VOICE: Who brought the news? Let us cheer him.

LEO *shakes his head. The crowd continues to cheer wildly*

LEO (*sharply to ANDREW*): What can we do to get them away? I will not have them shouting like this outside the palace all the morning. They will distract the King.

ANDREW: The Archbishop, my lord. . . .

ARCHBISHOP (*has overheard and comes forward, motioning for silence*): My children! My children, I say! In the transports of your joy, do not forget Who it is that has made you joyful. Is it by chance, do you think, that we, outposts as we are of God's Holy Church in this wild land, have withstood the heathen while all others have fallen before him? He came out of the east like the waves of the sea, like a flock of locusts, like the grains of a sand-storm in the desert whence he came. His hosts darkened the snows of our mountains, his camp-fires dimmed our stars at night. But God put His strength into the hearts of our soldiers, and they forgot themselves, and their fears, and all but the love of God and hatred of the unbeliever. Thus it was that we conquered, and therefore to God we give our thanks. To the Cathedral, all! To the Cathedral! The bells shall ring and the priests shall sing to-day!

He goes forward and motions the crowd on, holding up his crozier. They begin to file out, shouting "To the Cathedral!" and singing

I must go, my lord Chancellor. They will expect me to be there. Your Majesty. . . . (*He bows to the KING and begins to retire.*)

KING: Wait! (*The ARCHBISHOP pauses.*) It would be more fitting if I were to give thanks to God at the head of my people. Leo——

LEO: Your Majesty, this affair brings others behind it. It is of importance to the kingdom that they should be dealt with at once. I think (*speaking half to the ARCHBISHOP*) . . . a private service of thanksgiving in the Royal Chapel . . . later. . . .

The ARCHBISHOP bows again to the KING and goes out

KING: I will attend to this business at once. We must always remember, Leo, that the service of the kingdom is the true service of God.

LEO: I endeavour always to remember it, sir.

KING: Let a message be sent to my soldiers, telling them that I am much gratified by their success. They have deserved my confidence in them.

LEO (*having bowed*): Andrew, make a note of that.

ANDREW bows and scribbles on a tablet

Show me a draft this afternoon.

KING: And the messenger . . . yes, the messenger. (*He looks about vaguely.*) Where is he?

LEO (*smiling*): Here, sir. (*He draws DAVID nearer.*)

KING: Give him my thanks and ten gold pieces. Tell him that he shall be excused from active service and made a sergeant in my own bodyguard. And he may kiss my hand, and tell his comrades about it when they are all in barracks again.

LEO: Do you not know him, sir?

KING: Know him? Why should I know him?

LEO: He has kissed your hand before, sir. His clothes are torn, and his face is covered with sweat and dust and blood. And he is a little drawn with fatigue. But he is the son of your very faithful and useful subject, Aaron the merchant. His name is David.

KING: An officer. Aaron's son—David. Of course, I remember. (*Graciously*) I congratulate you, David. No one could have been more agreeable to me as a bearer of good news from the front. Were you in the fighting? (*He does not wait for an answer.*) And do you mean to follow your father in his honourable career?

LEO: He is almost *my* son, sir, and in this all mine. Aaron is my oldest and truest friend, and he has given me his son—because I have no children, but only one daughter. I have long watched this boy, hoping that he might grow up to serve you as I have done. Now I am beginning to expect much of him.

KING: That is very good. He may stay with us and listen to our business. What is it?

LEO: This, sir. The army has won a great victory against heavy odds. The soldiers, like the citizens, are beside themselves with joy. But no more than a week ago, they were far from joyful, so far that they murmured on parade. I had a report on the spirit of the troops which alarmed me. The men, loyal fellows as they are, were beginning to be restless, to grumble indeed—

KING (*offended*): To grumble?

LEO: Because they had received no pay, sir. For the moment, that is over. No man who has charged

over the enemy's lines, and seen the enemy run before him, and is still glad to find himself alive, stops to remember yesterday's grievance. But the glow of a victorious day soon fades out of the minds of the victors. The discontent will return, and then it will be bitterer than ever. We must make a distribution of pay. I have discussed it with the Treasurer and heard his arguments against it.

TREASURER: I make no comment on the spirit of the army, Chancellor. The reports come to you, not to me. But you know my views. The Treasury is not a widow's cruze. Far from it. We are severely hampered . . . the salt-tax is coming in very badly. . . .

KING: There, my Leo—you yourself have put the matter very well. We can wait until the discontent is renewed. This lucky battle will help us to keep a little longer the few coins we still have in hand. And it would be a pity if the greatest triumph of my reign were not to be celebrated by an arch, say, or perhaps a column.

LEO: Speak, David. Tell his Majesty what you told me.

DAVID (*with diffidence, but not self-consciously*): Your Majesty, may I speak?

KING (*with condescension*): Yes, my boy. Speak, by all means. Let us see your statesmanship.

DAVID (*with more eagerness*): Your Majesty, I am fresh from the army and I believe that I know a little of what the men are thinking. If I were a common soldier, in need of my pay, before long the want of it, perhaps even against my will, would make me discontented.

TREASURER: With all respect to you, Chancellor, and to your more or less adopted son, I think that these accounts of the spirit of the troops are always very highly coloured. You do not suggest mutiny, young man?

DAVID (*still addressing the KING*): I beg, sir, that you will not misunderstand me. The army is loyal. It does not grumble even at its officers, far less against the King. But—it . . . grumbles.

TREASURER: Precisely; that is my point. I was a soldier myself when I was a young man. Soldiers always do grumble.

DAVID: But, sir, which would be the better course? To distribute arrears of pay to discontented men who have long demanded it? Or to give it freely as a reward to men exulting in their victory? If they are paid now, the soldiers will overflow with love and praise of their King.

KING: Leo, the boy speaks with intelligence. I hope you will be able to make some use of him.

TREASURER: The boy speaks with eloquence, at least. The fire of youth and the wisdom of——

LEO: I agree with you, sir, that a distribution should be made to the army at once.

KING: You express my decision correctly. And yet . . . a triumphal arch . . . with carvings—the Turks in flight, and St. Michael, who is my patron, smiting them. . . .

LEO (*to the TREASURER*): My lord, his Majesty will visit the Treasury to-day to perform the necessary ceremonial. I shall be in attendance. Will you go before us, to make preparation? My clerk will follow you and give you the papers. Andrew!

The TREASURER lifts his hands as if in protest, thinks better of it, bows low to the KING, and goes out, followed by ANDREW

LEO (*to the PREFECT*): You will see to the clearing of the streets.

PREFECT: I will, my lord.

He bows and goes out

LEO: There is one thing more, sir.

KING: Speak, Leo.

LEO: To-day this young man has been twice so happy as to be of trifling service to your Majesty. May he ask, in overwhelming return, a blessing on his approaching marriage?

KING: Your marriage, my boy? I am very glad to hear of it. Let the son of my servant Aaron marry and beget more faithful servants for me. Ah, Leo, Leo, if but the faithful alone were fruitful, and the traitorous always barren!

LEO: There are no traitors in your kingdom, sir.

KING: A king must always be on his guard against traitors; it is his duty to his subjects as well as to himself. Why, Leo, if even you were ever to raise a doubt in my mind—— But that you have never done, Leo! Never, never! For thirty years you have carried out all my orders faithfully and helped me in the heavy task of government. Ah, what years, what labours have I devoted to my country! And now this young man whom you recommend to me is to be married. He is grown up, and he will take a wife. What bride has your father chosen for you? Or has your—your almost father made the choice?

DAVID: They have chosen together, sir. My bride is Helena, the only daughter of my lord Leo, who is my second father.

KING: They have chosen very well between them. Nothing could be more suitable. They knew in advance that I should approve. No, David, I shall not give you my blessing to-day. You may ask me for it again—at your wedding, where you are to expect me as a guest.

LEO: We are deeply grateful for your Majesty's condescension.

DAVID: Your Majesty honours me.

KING: I will go and think over this matter of a triumphal arch.

LEO: It shall be considered, sir. I will consult with the Palace Architect.

He and DAVID bow to the KING, who goes into the Palace with a slight gesture of dismissal. They both stand staring after him for a moment

DAVID (*ironically*): And you have chosen me as your successor, my second father?

LEO: It is my hope. Why not?

DAVID (*pointing after the KING*): That?

LEO (*laying a hand on his shoulder and speaking fondly*): That! You foolish boy! What is that? Have you given up riding because your horse, like all horses, is unaccountable and stupid?

DAVID: But you are forced to obey such a man—a man whom you can treat with so much calmness of contempt that he does not even know himself despised.

LEO: As you grow older, David, you will not the

less despise a fool, but you will cease to let his folly ruffle your mind. That is one of the many things you will learn. But I do not want you to learn too soon, and that is why I am going to send you away now. If you followed me and saw all the papers I must sign this morning, the sight would dismay you even more than our wise and gracious King. The bearer of good news must have a holiday. What will you do with it?

DAVID (*hesitatingly*): I should like . . . to visit Helena.

LEO: No! It would not be proper. It is out of the question.

DAVID: But, my father, we played together every day when we were children. I think I loved her even then.

LEO: You played together as children, David? How long ago was that?

DAVID: I have not seen her for nine years.

LEO: Not since she was ten and you twelve. Nine years! And you are to be married next week.

DAVID: She will come to me veiled, you leading her, her bridesmaids about her. Perhaps she will be afraid of me. She must have forgotten. I want to see her before——

LEO: You want to see whether your playmate of nine years ago——

DAVID (*eagerly*): Yes!

LEO: Is a fit bride for you?

DAVID: No, no, no! If she is still my friend, if she still loves me. I remember days, in those days, when I was selfish and unkind, when I hated her and she hid from me. We were children then. . . .

LEO: David, I forbid it. Nine years ago we separated you, when it was no longer right that you should be playmates together. Helena cried then, many days, but you had your games with the other boys. Now—there is one week more, and you will be husband and wife.

DAVID: What does it matter, then? You say she cried. . . .?

LEO: We are not peasants. We, more than all the rest, must do what is decent and fitting. And you, David, must be spotless in the sight of this our world. So much lies before you, my son, that is yours to do whether you like it or not. You will have your father's great wealth to help you—and more, for you will have my favour—and more, for you will have yourself, and I should not so choose you if I thought lightly of you. It is not a trifling thing, David, to rule even this kingdom. We are alone here, we, the little hill-people, with our city and our church and our faith, all alone among the infidel. I have not found it easy work, and you will not find it easy—but it is work well worth the doing. Now, dear David, you must go. I have talked to you too long and too seriously. Go away, my boy, and enjoy your holiday.

DAVID (*a little rebelliously*): I promise you I will do my best to enjoy my holiday.

He turns away. LEO smiles after him with benevolent wisdom as

The Curtain falls

SECOND SCENE

A street in the city. A BEGGAR is huddled on a doorstep, with his begging-bowl in front of him. CITIZENS pass over, talking. Some of them look at him, frown, shake their heads, and go on.

BEGGAR (*in a sing-song voice*): Give 'me a penny
for the love of God!

Give me a penny, give a poor old man
A penny, for the love of God a penny,
And I will make your names ring in my prayers
Till Heaven must hear me.

The last CITIZEN passes out

Curse their puffy flesh!
May God bring ills upon them, snatch their
money,
Throw down their houses, make their wives un-
faithful,
Give them for sons and daughters thieves and
bitches,
Utterly ruin them!

Here I sit all day,
A wasted man, aching and marked with sores,
Hungry and thirsty always, and parched or
shivering,
Covered with dust, bitten by creeping vermin,

Hated by all, and thrust aside and spurned
By the rich passers-by whose silken robes
Sound vainly in my ear and sting my brain
With soft remembrances of better hours.
Would that I were what I have been, or else
That I had never been! God's anger on me
Falls, not a blow but a long enmity,
Untiring day by day and year by year:
And still with penny doles He keeps me alive
Till the full sum of His cold hate be added.
Would that I were what I have been! Ah, then,
In youth I was gay, glad and free. My brother
Followed me, aping me, a loving shadow,
Who came to me, cringing with piteous words,
For help when courage had been used so far
That not enough remained to fill the adventure.
Where is he now? Aaron, where are you now?
Lying perhaps upon the rich divan
In his own palace, in the fountain-court,
Hid from this dust and heat. His slaves attend him.
One brings him drink, another, maybe, announces
A noble of the land, a shrinking debtor,
Who comes to beg a respite of a week
Ere ruin strike him. And Aaron, drowsily,
Forbids his entrance, and exclaims: Tell him
The debt of a thousand florins is forgiven,
Or else: The debt must be discharged to-day,
What otherwise befalls he knows, so tell him.
Aaron, Aaron, Aaron! That last time
You gave me help, I saw our youth was dead,
Saw it in the wrinkles round your solemn lips,
The set of your fat eye-lids. And when again
I came to your door, stooping in shame and fear,

Your steward stopped me there and gave me,
grinning,
Your parting gift, a beggar's bowl, for alms!
This chipped and shabby bowl that lies here empty!
O Aaron! Aaron!

When we were young and fit for life at large
You followed where I led, and from my purse
Your hand was never absent. Have I not
Writ letters in your name to ladies, bribed
Porters for you, and soothed the company
When with your awkwardness you had enraged it,
Saved you from cheats and bullies and from
husbands,

And on mine own head taken our father's curse
For all our rambling deeds? And now you prosper,
Fattened on bargaining and cent. per cent.,
And here I sit, or in some corner sleep,
Or on the dung-soiled straw in any stable,
Where the grooms give me shelter for the night,
To treat me as their butt and thing of scorn,
Which pays the lodging. And daily in my breast
This hurt eats on apace, as outwardly
The sores dissolve my wholesome flesh, and
cankers

Invisibly my heart. O, this resentment
Feeds upon hope and kindness and love of virtue
And gnaws the goodness of the natural man,
Leaving instead a rotten mess of evil,
An envious ulcer that grows and grows and grows,
Till I, who once was joy, am hatred now!

Two CITIZENS enter

Give me a penny, give a poor old man

A penny, for the love of God a penny,
And I will make your names ring in my prayers—

FIRST CITIZEN: O, well! a penny isn't much to ask for.

SECOND CITIZEN: Go on, then. Give him a penny, and shame me into giving him one as well. Then, when your wife says you are soft-hearted, or some one in the market who is trying to flatter you, you can blush and look awkward, and deny it, and feel pleased with yourself. That's cheap at a penny surely! (*He throws a coin ringingly into the bowl.*)

BEGGAR (*with unctuous humility*): God bless you, sir. Often a kind heart speaks with a rough tongue.

FIRST CITIZEN (*ostentatiously laying a silver coin in the bowl*): There, old man. I shall depend on you for your prayers.

BEGGAR: May God bless you indeed, sir. You have given me food and lodging for a week. O, what a happy man I am to-day! The relief . . . and the kindness. . . . (*He weeps.*)

FIRST CITIZEN: Things like this are horrible to me. They make me hate my house and my meals.

SECOND CITIZEN: Is it necessary? Your wife cooks abominably. I dare say, if we only knew, this old gentleman has a charming house in the suburbs, and a domestic staff beyond reproach.

BEGGAR: O, sir, I was not always like this. I was once rich. I had once a house in the suburbs and servants who, if not above reproach, looked after me well enough. And now—

FIRST CITIZEN: Poor old man! Take this other florin, and spend it on a luxury, and pray again for me.

BEGGAR: O, sir——!

SECOND CITIZEN: How came you to be so reduced?

BEGGAR: My own folly, and the ingratitude of friends.

SECOND CITIZEN: You were very rich?

BEGGAR: My father was rich. And to-day my brother is rich, he whom I led by the hand, until he turned on me. He is the richest of all the merchants in this accursèd city, but me he hates——

SECOND CITIZEN: You must be much older than you look.

BEGGAR: Why, sir? If I can believe the puddles I see my face in, I fear I look older than I am.

SECOND CITIZEN: Because when I was only four years old, when I was walking with my father, he gave a penny to a beggar—we have always been a frugal family—and heard from him just the same story that you have told. I think you must be the man.

FIRST CITIZEN: Don't laugh at him!

SECOND CITIZEN (*with a shrug*): Your money is your own.

BEGGAR (*watching them with innocent and pitiable anxiety*): I have had great misfortunes.

FIRST CITIZEN: I am sure you have. And what an end to them! To sit here, day after day, imploring the hard-hearted for their charity. And hard-hearted they are! Our three coins lie alone in your bowl. Is that all you have taken to-day?

BEGGAR: Alas, sir, it is all I have taken in three days.

FIRST CITIZEN: You have starved for three days?

BEGGAR: Starved, sir.

FIRST CITIZEN: Horrible! But I will help you.

Come to my house to-night, near the Western Gate, and you shall have food and some old clothes and dry straw in an outhouse. My name is Michael.

SECOND CITIZEN: My dear Michael, do you keep fowls? If so, you might save yourself disillusionment by offering them to him now.

BEGGAR (*humbly*): The gentleman will have his joke.

A SOLDIER comes in, carrying a spear

SOLDIER (*to the BEGGAR*): Get on out of it, you swine. Clear out of this.

FIRST CITIZEN: How dare you speak to him like that? Why should you bully him? *I am speaking to him.*

SOLDIER (*politely*): Let me warn you, sir, not to hinder me in the execution of my duty. But, if you must know, the King will shortly pass by on his way to the Treasury to make a distribution of pay to the army—and high time too. Get on, dog.

He prods the BEGGAR with the butt of his spear

FIRST CITIZEN: No, you shall not——

SECOND CITIZEN: Don't be a fool.

SOLDIER (*carelessly*): I expect he's been taking you in with a wonderful story about his troubles. Come on, old rat. (*He prods the BEGGAR again.*)

FIRST CITIZEN: This is a most deserving case. I intend to relieve it——

The SOLDIER prods the BEGGAR again and harder, so that he rises to his feet with a cry of pain. As he does so, coins fall out of his clothes and roll in every direction. He sprawls on the ground, trying to collect them.

FIRST CITIZEN (*angrily*): Did you lie to me, you beast? (*He raises his stick to strike the BEGGAR.*)

SOLDIER (*interposing his spear*): Better leave that to me, sir, if you don't mind. Come on, you old villain, pick them up and be off with you.

BEGGAR (*crouching in bestial attitudes to collect the coins, still prodded by the SOLDIER*): They are not so many . . . after all. . . . (*He crawls past the SOLDIER and runs out.*)

SOLDIER: Hi! No, not that way! You're going towards the King: O, well, he's off my beat, anyway.

FIRST CITIZEN: Such cheats ought to be driven out of the city altogether.

SECOND CITIZEN: If I were you, I should say nothing about it.

SOLDIER: Ah, I'll lay you're not the first gentleman he's taken in. Good morning, gentlemen.

He goes out

SECOND CITIZEN: If the King is going to pass this way, we might as well stay here to see him go.

FIRST CITIZEN: Yes, it will be a good place. To the Treasury, the soldier said.

SECOND CITIZEN: Yes. And he said—And high time too.

FIRST CITIZEN: What do you mean by that?

SECOND CITIZEN: Only that I agree with the soldier.

FIRST CITIZEN: It is very right to distribute pay on the morrow of a victory. We must always remember our brave fighting men and——

*Other CITIZENS have been gathering on the stage,
and now one of them joins in the argument*

THIRD CITIZEN: My son is one of our brave fighting men, and he's longing to be remembered. Says he hasn't been able to buy himself a drink for a month. (*Laughter.*) I wonder what they'll give him now—about a quarter of what they owe him, most likely.

FOURTH CITIZEN: Ah, that's as may be.

FIRST CITIZEN: But we are very poor, the Treasury is almost empty, the taxes are heavier than we can bear——

FOURTH CITIZEN: Ah, that's as may be. (*Laughter.*)

THIRD CITIZEN: The troops are the people. And Leo is the friend of the people.

FIRST CITIZEN: What do you mean? Who are you?

THIRD CITIZEN: Perhaps you don't know me. But you need not be afraid of me, even if I do dare to say what I think.

SECOND CITIZEN: What do you think? It may be that we think alike.

THIRD CITIZEN: That we are an unhappy people, and that Leo is as good a friend to us as he is allowed to be.

VOICES: What's that?—What is he saying?—Leo!—He's talking dangerously!

FIRST CITIZEN: What do you say? Are you a traitor?

THIRD CITIZEN: Never mind what I say. An honest man can speak his mind freely, I hope.

FOURTH CITIZEN: Ah, that's as may be.

There is a confused murmur of voices in which the FIRST and SECOND CITIZENS come together again

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The fall has jarred you so, you are distracted,
Yet I believe no mischief has been done.
Who said a doctor dwelt here? Fetch him quickly.
Our master needs him.

KING: Did you say a doctor?
What do you mean by that? O, Leo, Leo,
Spare me that I may go to end my days,
A monk in some cold mountain monastery,
Harmless and unmolested. If, when I reigned,
I ever did offend you, now forget it;
This is your turn.

LEO (*urgently*): I beg you, sir, be quiet.
You are overheard.

KING: Where am I? Where are we?
Do you mock me, Leo? I thought. . . . 'I am
astray. . . .

He stares about him in a confused manner

I fell and I was stunned, I am better. Tell me,
What threw me down?

LEO: My lord, this wretched beggar,
Who here awaits his proper punishment,
Ran crouching from the gutter, as we passed,
Towards you, with some ill thought, as I guess,
Either perhaps to stab you or to throw
By touching you a ghastly charm on you.
But as he ran so foul a sight amazed
My horse, which shied and reared and fell on yours
And threw you from the saddle.

KING: As I thought—
The girths were much too loose.

LEO: O Lord, forgive
The unwitting harm which your poor servant did.

KING: What, am I safe then? Was there no
attempt? . . .

LEO: None, sir, save what this man did rashly
make,

And that is over and miscarried.

KING: Rashly? . . .

The word is strange.

LEO: Because the man is mad,
With wicked madness.

KING: Do not be so hasty;
Slowly, until I get my breath again.
And was there nothing else? Tell me, have you
Seen him before? Swear to me, Leo.

LEO: I swear
I know him not, neither shall any man
Know him again. Judgment is passed on him.
BEGGAR (*screaming*): O Sword of Christ in Asia,
let me speak.

LEO: Silence, abhorred and wicked carrion!

BEGGAR (*with dignity*): I speak to the King.

KING (*suddenly*): And I will hear him speak.
Shall not the meanest of my folk be heard
Before I order him to death?

BEGGAR: Oh, kindness!
Oh, goodness clothèd in a royal robe!
In whose hands life and death reside, conjoined
With the scrolls of law. . . . I know not how to say
What I must say, your presence dazzles me.

KING: Speak on, my servant, speak, and have no
fear:

In life, or past it, we are both God's children.

BEGGAR: I am an old, infirm and wretched man,
Having nothing left in life but a few years
Empty of joy and full of slow, dark pain.
Therefore I set these years upon the cast
To touch your sacred hand and so be healed
Or to exchange my long-drawn agony

For a brief pang, under your royal sword.
 My master, and my King, whom I adore,
 Find it not crime in me that this man's horse,
 Huge and unseemly managed, bore you down.
 But if I die, grant me this boon at least,
 To slay me now with your own kingly hand,
 The second best that you can give to me,
 Yet if you would, you still can make me whole.
 But I will die. Yet, Master, as you strike,
 Ponder what I shall say. . . .

KING: What?

BEGGAR: In the hour of death,
 God gives me light. Now learn I why He has
 Kept me so long in pain and misery,
 Why starved me, why tormented me with boils,
 Why driven me to-day to such an act .
 As brings me near my end. I was reserved,
 And purified by pain, and moved by madness
 That thus in my last hour to His Anointed
 I might His Word deliver. Strike, O King,
 But after striking bear God's word in mind—
 What the horse did the rider yet may do!

LEO: He is impertinent.

KING: The word is dangerous.

LEO: But spare him if you will. He is a madman,
 Whom we can see to. I will have him watched.

Andrew— ANDREW *comes forward*

KING: Clerk, the King's will is in *my* mouth.
 (To LEO) Will not your watchers put him in a
 place

Where they can save their labour?

LEO: Sir, you jest.

Do anything with him, but mount again.
 I see the fall has hardly shaken you,
 And time goes on, the sun is growing hot,
 And business waits us. Come, to horse, my lord!

KING: God's voice may issue from a beggar's
 mouth,
 And this man's eyes and voice have something
 strange,

As though his sufferings had lit a fire
 Deep in the heart, for God's own purposes.
 Leo, how did it come that you, who are
 So tried a horseman, with a wrist of iron,
 Knew not the management of that great beast,
 Seeing that it has carried you so long?

LEO: My lord, you mock me, and unkindly, to
 play

Thus with the foul words of a maniac,
 Too dark and wild for any answer here,
 So many common folk being gathered round
 That hear us talking. Mount, my lord, and on.

KING: Leo, I much mistrust you.

LEO starts angrily

Do you doubt it?

LEO: It is a word not easy to believe
 In the mouth of him who was so long my friend.

KING: Yet doubts must be resolved where truth
 is blazoned.

What, man, do you look proudly at me, think
 That when you have me once again in private
 You'll scold me and chastise me for my rudeness?
 I am your King!

LEO: Sir, this to an old friend——

KING: No friend to me, a too-long pampered
servant!

Dare not to answer! Silence, silence, silence!

I am the King!

A long pause

I strip your honours off,
You are no more Chancellor! Lay down your office,
Dishonourable man, whom I have loved
So many years so much to mine own peril.
This is the end. Leo, I loved you then
When you did seem a meek, obedient servant,
The Kingdom's shield, as I the Kingdom's sword.
I am ashamed to have imperilled thus
My sacred heritage. Give me your seals
And leave me, lest my anger master me.

LEO: You are distraught, my lord, you wander
still,

You wits are shaken——

KING: This I will not bear!

O God, from Whom I have my sovereignty,
Put out Thy hand and take me by the wrist
Lest by my stroke these gray good-seeming hairs
Be smeared with his own blood. I swear to you,
Leo, I swear it by my father's tomb,
Go from me quickly—this I shall not bear—
Go, go, go, go!

LEO: Now most of all I stay,

For now most basely should I play the traitor,
Did I desert you in this nightmare fit.
Master, my duty conquers any fear
And this poor life, which gladly I would risk
Against ill-wishers, must I not expose
Even to your own wrath when you need it so?

KING: How subtly and how smoothly do you speak!

This was your power, this, not nobility.

LEO: Let me but use my power, whate'er it be,
To serve you.

KING: Nay, mine eyes are open now.
Leo, you much mistake me. Never more
Have I been sane and governing in my reason,
But you provoke me.

LEO: I too am provoked,
But we will speak of this another time.

KING: I have spoken once.

LEO: But words so lightly spoken
Fly off like feathers. Lord, what will you do?
How will you rule the crank, uneasy realm
Which I have borne so long with pain and toil?
The army murmurs, and its victory
May be to-morrow vain, the infidel
Come crowding in again across our frontiers.
Where is another man to fill my place,
To serve you and to shield you as I have done?

KING: There speaks the tyrant, thus you have
unveiled

Your villainy in full. Man, I can make
A Chancellor from the mud upon my shoes!
Listen to me, proud man, watch what I do—
This poor despised beggar, this mere sore,
The semblance of a man, shall fill your place
And fill it nobly since I so ordain.
You, guards, release our Chancellor and hail him.
Rise, man, and let me kiss you. There—and there—
You are installed, you are my minister,
Confirmed with absolute power in my name.

BEGGAR (*standing upright, his arms above his head*):
O Lord, O Splendour, Scales and Sword in one,
Shall thus the humble be exalted, thus
Shall divine justice be dispensed on earth
Before the judgment day?

KING: Arise and rule,
As I command you. Speak now, Leo, speak.
Has not your cunning any word for this?
What do you say?

LEO: Lord, I am broken and dumb—
O Lord, bethink you, for the times are heavy.
Your ancient throne, though you will see it not,
Trembles beneath you and the infidels
Still range in power against our sacred sword.

KING: Your words are treasonous!

LEO: O my lord, my lord,
I speak in duty. Break me, if it must be,
When I have done my task, not yet . . . not now. . . .
A little time . . . not now. . . .

BEGGAR (*with wide, staring eyes, as if in a trance*):
I am exalted!

KING: How like a taken felon he sobs and
stammers,
As thin a husk of man as this has been,
Who now swells out, portly, authoritative,
Filled with the breath and fire of royal favour.
Chancellor, tell me your name.

BEGGAR: 'Tis long forgot—
Once it was Jacob.

KING: Jacob, take the seals:
Rule as I bid you.

LEO: But the people, lord—

KING: My people, I, your master, order you

KING: How subtly and how smoothly do you speak!

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Once it was Jacob.

KING: Jacob, take the seals:
Rule as I bid you.

LEO: But the people, lord—

KING: My people, I, your master, order you

To cheer for Jacob.

A FEW VOICES: Jacob! Long live Jacob!

A VOICE: Shame on this wickedness!

MANY VOICES: Down, tear him down!

Jacob's our master, Jacob! Jacob lives!

KING: Now take the seals.

BEGGAR: Fellow, give me the seals.

KING: You, clerk—I cannot keep your name in
mind—

This is your business.

ANDREW: If you bid me, sir—

(To LEO): My lord, I must obey our lord. The
seals. . . .

LEO: I will obey.

ANDREW *takes the seals from his fingers and
gives them to JACOB*

KING: This warning comes too late,
My Leo, to avail you, but you learn
Thus at the last how kings make ministers
Powerful and well-beloved, and can unmake
them.

Thus I unmake you, as I'd throw away
A sword with faulty hilt that seemed to threaten
More hurt than help. Jacob, you shall be housed
As best befits your office. See to it.
I will ride home again. We will consider
Anew the rash intent that would lay bare
My treasury of gold.

LEO: Give back the seals!
This kills us all!

KING: Silence! Your first command
Shall be to our own guards to take this man

And whip him like a thief. Then follow me.

He goes out

BEGGAR (*hoarsely*): Seize him!

LEO: Beware! you know me, all of you.

BEGGAR: Seize him—he has not drawn his sword.

Two of the GUARDS put their hands on LEO's shoulders

LEO: Just God!
Make Thou me calm, give me a careful mind!

BEGGAR: Are you in fear of me? Do you pray to God?

But God hath shown His mercy on my side
And struck the proud man from his seat. Then
cringe

Before this lifted hand that God impels.
You fear me not? Why, you have eyes, although
You set your mouth so firmly, square your
shoulders,

And through your eyes I see your anxious soul
Shaken and trembling—and I see your fingers
Cramping and clutching as the iron dread
Invades your body. But be comforted,
I have not spoken death.

LEO: Of dignity
I will not speak to you, but of respect
I may speak, for you know your master, slave.
BEGGAR: Foul beast, and fallen beast, and captive
beast,

I, if I would, might strike you in the mouth,
Defile your combèd beard, might maul your face

With these black fingers which, an hour ago,
If you had dropped a penny in my bowl
You'd have been careful not to touch. See them!
See the dirt worked into the human skin!
But, now the will of God has made them strong,
You fear me!

LEO: Basest of corrupted men,
Think you with words to hide *your* fear of *me*?
If not, let what our lord has bidden be done:
Order these men to whip me.

BEGGAR: Cringing dog,
I hold you in my power, I——

LEO: Silence, coward!
You drag *my* honours in the dirt unless
You can say that which better will beseem
The place I held.

BEGGAR (*choking*): Fallen—miserable——

LEO: Issue your orders.

BEGGAR (*hoarsely and haltingly*): Take this man
away
And whip him—gently . . . and then set him free.

LEO (*as he is dragged away*): But I shall live.

BEGGAR: Ah God! I am rich, I am great!
Am I not great? God chooses me for a wonder.
I am exalted, I am Chancellor!
Bring me my horse!

*He staggers across the stage and stands swaying with
one hand on his heart, the other on his throat, as*

The Curtain falls

THIRD SCENE

The women's quarters in LEO's house.

HELENA and her NURSE.

NURSE: His lips are red, his nose narrow, his
eyes
Lively with many lights, his eyebrows arched. . . .

HELENA: Speak on, speak on! I listen with my
heart,

Where all the wild blood lingers for the tale.

NURSE: Ah, happy maid, to wed in such a house,
Old and securely built on certain wealth
And praised in all the city. Never yet
Since Christ came down on earth has any merchant
Risen to so much wealth or grown so great
As Aaron. Never yet has any man
Promised his son so rich a heritage,
So many jewels, houses, lands, and slaves,
And with all these so honourable a name,
As David shall possess.

HELENA: God send my pillow,
Wedded or maiden, other dreams than these!
Were it not shame in me if I should reckon
The wealth of David side by side with love?

NURSE: Love is a perishable stuff, and wealth
Endures above the changes of the world.
Hearken, my dear, David may rest a day

On your heart's bough for love, but in his house
You must live all your life. And Aaron's house
Covers, the gossip says, a hundred acres
Of gardens, with pavilions, and heavy orchards
Of quince and peach and mulberry and pear.
There in those pleasancess are little bowers,
Encircled by tall shaven walls of box,
And curiously adorned
With bushes trimmed in all fantastic shapes,
Where slender fountains waver in the wind,
Hardly descried against the burning air.
And they have chosen slaves, Ethiops and dwarfs
From the burnt South, and supple Syrians,
And the submissive Indians, and the white
Upstanding savages with yellow hair,
And these attend in honour continually
Their masters and their mistresses, and bring,
When they shall call for it, the rarest wine,
Cool in the long, slim cups of amethyst. . . .
It is a dream, their life is such a life
As I can enter only in a dream.

HELENA: You have not dreamt my dreams.

NURSE: You dream amiss—

These are the pillars of a goodly life,
So you will learn.

HELENA: I would not muse upon
The huge and dusty bales that wait the moth
In Aaron's warehouse, or the trivial joys
Of gardens, or of cool and foaming wine.
Tell me again of David. You have sullied
The clear reflective waters of my mind.
With all this talk of palaces and slaves.
My soul inclines to David. Is he not

My love and my betrothed? And was he not
For years my first companion?

NURSE:

David, David . . .

Not twice in this life have I seen a youth
Gallant as he. He cantered through the city
On a tall Arab, and his soldier's sabre
That swung and glittered lightly at his belt
Vied with the blazing ruby at his throat.
He shone with light, his horse, caparisoned
In gorgeous gold, moved like a glowing beast,
And they two seemed to draw the sun with them
Along the street and leave a shade behind.

HELENA: You cheat me still. I have a casket of
stones,

Strung or unstrung, or set in silver or gold,
Which I can spread to take the light and please
me

With many colours. What are these to me?
I ask of David, ask you of my love,
Whom I would follow were he clad in rags
To share the gross meat in his begging-bowl.
Tell me of him.

NURSE:

I have a hundred times
Described him to you, said that he is tall,
Broad in the shoulders, with a mighty arm,
Yet with a lovely, with an angel's face,
A warrior-angel's, with soft eyes of love,
The curving mouth of pride, and power's wide
nostrils,

And the clear, quickly flushing skin that speaks
Of an unconquerable heart.

HELENA:

Has he . . .

Speak truth, has any heard him speak of me?

NURSE: He said: By God, I pledge my hand and sword

That never will I touch the cup again
Until my bride upon our bridal day
Hands me her own. I shall not know my loss,
Having so much a greater loss than this
Till I am wed with her.

HELENA: O David! David!
Why is the day so long?

NURSE: He said: My life
Plods onward, as a lame and stumbling horse
The last and weariest league towards the well,
But in that well (he said) I know resides
The vital wave that is my joy, my hope.

HELENA: David, my bowels melt, mine eyes are
dazzled.

Why is the day so long? Why do our fathers
Set up this intermission from the promise
To the fulfilment? We are like one who feasts
Emptily on the names of costly dishes
Which feed him not but stab him keenlier
With hunger.

NURSE: Then he said: The maid
Is swift and gracious as a hill-side deer
And ardent as the bird that fills the noon
With love's sweet murmurs. Ah, my dear, my
dove,
(He cried, and claspt his hands), why is the day
Set so far off?

HELENA: Alas, David, my own!
Did you not say his mouth was arched with pride?

NURSE: Yes, taut and firm as a good archer's
bow.

HELENA: Did you not say his eyes were full of light?

NURSE: Brighter for her he loves than is the sun.

HELENA: Is not his body strong? Is he not tall?

NURSE: Strong as a lion, as a cedar tall,
Driven by a great and high-designing heart,
That feeds on pride and the dear thoughts of love.

HELENA: My nurse, these eighteen years you
have cherished me.

I am your nursling, fed first at your breast,
Afterwards tended by your hands, and taught
By your wise mouth. Say, am I meet for him?
Tell me, tell me the truth. Will he discover,
When he beholds me, when he lifts my veil,
What he desires? Tell me, I am afraid.

NURSE: Be comforted, dear child, dear fosterling,
When you are his, he shall be amazed to find
So much more than he dreamt.

HELENA: Then am I fair?

NURSE: A flower, a pearl, a bird of paradise.

HELENA: Would that the day were here.

A pause

HELENA: But—this one thing . . .
Will he behold in me what he remembers,
If he remembers, as I do, those days
When we were children? Nurse, he loved me then,
Or now I think he did, for memory here,
In woman's life, plays always upon nothings,
Pares them away and adds to them until
Nought's what it was but all as now we'd have it.
Men in their lives discard such trifles lightly.

NURSE: To-day I gave him an old toy of yours

And when he had it in his hand his eyes
Grew softer, brighter, and the tears were ready. . . .

HELENA: Would that the day were here !

NURSE: Perhaps that day
May throw a light before it and gild this hour
As on the hill-tops you may see the sun
Long ere he rises up to warm the world
For waking and for work.

HELENA: You show a secret.
What do you mean?

NURSE: Your husband yearns for you,
As you for him, and being a man and free,
And a brave youth, rich both in gold and cunning—
Enough, no more, no more, but wait what comes.

HELENA: You move my blood to strange and
hidden thoughts.
Speak to me plainly.

NURSE: Soon enough for you
My meaning shall be plain. Ah, fosterling,
God grant I am not careless of your honour
Who love you all too much.

HELENA: What do you mean?

A SERVANT comes in

SERVANT: Mistress, a messenger awaits without
Bearing a chest of gifts from the lord David,
Which, he vows, he must without fail deliver
To your own hands.

HELENA: Ah, tokens from my love!

NURSE: A robe of cloth of gold enriched with
pearls,
Or turquoise armlets, or an Indian mirror,
Proof of his wealth and generosity.

HELENA: Let him bring in the chest.

The SERVANT goes out

Yet I would ask
Only one gift of him to-day—himself.
The rest is dust and withered leaves to me.

NURSE: Veil yourself, child, before the porter comes.

HELENA *veils herself*. A PORTER *comes in, stooping under a great chest*

PORTER (*in a muffled voice*): My master sends his humblest salutations

To the lady Helena, and this interrogation:
Whether her love for him is like his love,
Strong as the firmament, to bear whatever
Love may impose on it, whether she loves him
Enough to take in love the gifts he sends,
Whatever they may be—for I am not
Even to rest the load with which I stoop
Unless she assures me with her very mouth
That David's choice makes the gift pleasant to her.

HELENA: Vain enquiry! Porter, set down the chest,

For there is nothing in the world I know
That would not to the level of fine gold
Be raised by David's choice.

PORTER (*throwing down the chest*): There's nothing in the chest,
But I am David.

HELENA: O my soul!

DAVID: My love,
Forgive the trick. My heart was so afire

That I could not refrain. Grant me forgiveness.

HELENA: Am I not pledged to take whatever gift
You pleased to send me? Did you not bind my will
With false devices and contrivances
Before my brain could help me? And the oath
You got from me holds firm.

DAVID: Oh, wretched man!
On whom recoils his own unwieldy cannon
To crush him. Helena, here is the oath
Returned to you. Now drive me from your house
With anger and with curses. I will bear
Whatever you may please to put on me
For penance.

HELENA: Well it is I gave the oath
For you and me. Else 'twere my part to flee you,
Bold as you are, who seek to penetrate
Into my chamber ere the bridal day.
But I am sworn and will not now unswear
The oath that makes me happy.

DAVID: O, my heart,
Think not by standing still to taste for ever
The joy of this moment, and so die!
Helena, what can I say? Words are colourless
And gesture's nothing. All the real world
Fades round this core of joy, and my old language
Is useless for the needs of my new life.
Helena, lift your veil——

NURSE: My fosterling,
This plan was mine, the guilt is also mine.
Drop your rash hand from the unlucky act,
You know not what misfortune this will bring.

HELENA: My heart upon the sea of happiness
Rides like a ship upon a lucky tide,

And I am driven by the winds of love
Towards my harbour.

She lifts her veil

David, this is my face.

DAVID: I . . . cannot speak. Silence is strange.

NURSE: Unlucky!

Draw down your veil again, fall on your knees
And pray to God that he will keep away
The evil you invoke upon your head.

DAVID: Why do the words faint in my toiling
brain

And die upon my tongue? I was more eloquent
Upon your beauty ere I saw it.

HELENA: David,

This is a solemn and more sacred day
Than ever we shall know again. I give you
Here in this glance the first-fruits of my beauty
And of my spirit. As we take our earnest,
So the full payment of our lives shall be,
And in this moment of our joy the seed
Of future joy or sorrow is sown in earth.

NURSE: O sorrow! sorrow! O unlucky me!
My weakness has undone my fosterling.

HELENA: Peace, old woman. What guilt there be
in this

I take upon my head, and all the peril.
Should death now stop the spring and waste the
waters,

David, one cup at least we shall have shared,
And I am yours and you are mine for ever.

DAVID: On my head too the guilt, for now we
share

Good things and bad alike. Give me your hand.

She gives it

I never thought to find myself so blest,
Though all the city murmurs of your beauty
And I have painted you against dark air
Through the long nights as sleeplessly I lay,
Revolving in my mind what all men said
About you, worked and strove with wrestling
thoughts.

How strange it is! For often I have said—
If she be fair as I imagine her,
In the great moment when she lifts her veil,
My blood will stop, my heart confuse my eyes,
And I shall faint before her. But now I see you,
Fairer than ever I had thought you were,
And dear, as closely dear as I remembered,
I am at peace in body and in soul.

NURSE: Lady, lady!

HELENA: What is it, woman?

NURSE: Listen, there's a noise
In the outer hall. . . .

She runs and peers through the curtains

It is my lord returned,
But how disordered! Is our plot disclosed?

DAVID: Why, what's the matter? Does he come
this way?

NURSE: He is distracted, murmurs as he limps
About the hall, stares with fixed burning eyes
And runs his trembling fingers through his beard
That's torn already and clotted up with mud.
O God, he has discovered us. Quick, quick!

HELENA: What is the matter?

NURSE: Much the matter, come:
For I shall pay for this, perhaps with life.

HELENA: David! I grow dizzy.

DAVID: Belovèd!

NURSE: This bewilderment of love
Makes you unhandy, but if you would thank me
For aught that I have done, come to your senses.
This way he still may 'scape. . . Too late, too late!
My lord is lurching hither. Oh, it is rage
That thus consumes him. How his eyes burn, how
His hands lift up and snatch the air and fall
Helpless again. His rage has driven him mad.
All, all is lost. We are already slain.

HELENA: Not yet! Come, David, quickly. In his
madness
He might do you a hurt. Behind these curtains—
We will deceive him.

DAVID *is pushed into concealment. A moment later*
LEO *staggers, disordered, into the room*

Father, dearest father. . .

LEO: I am no more your father, call me not
By such a name. Off! do not touch me, off!

HELENA: You are my father, I am still your
daughter.

The link of love between us is not snapped,
Try and you'll feel the fastening in your heart.

NURSE (*crouching*): O mighty master, spare, I am
a sinner,
O spare, O spare, be pitiful in your rage!

LEO: Why does she kneel to me? Has she not heard
That nobody need pray me any more?

HELENA: Belovèd father——

LEO: I am no more belov'd,
I am not what I was, now I am nothing,
A straw upon the gutter's brawling spate,
A thing for jests, a madman, a poor beggar.
Touch me not. Off! I am no longer Leo!
No more your father—no more Chancellor!

HELENA: My dear, my master——

LEO: Peace, I am dishonoured.
The master's shame abates the servant's pride,
The father's shame is the child's death in life.
Why have I lived to be a worthless thing,
A remnant of humanity, a scrap
Of rubbish idly thrown beside the road?
Stretch not your hands towards me. If a king
Can break his oath, forgetting twenty years,
And reckoning that old loyalty a trifle,
Why not a child? Seek my supplanter's house
And be to him what you have been to me,
While I was prosperous. Do not shrink and cringe:
Too well I know that fear's a mask of shame.
Do not expostulate with those wide eyes,
For your amazement sears my heart again
That was, I thought, this hour burnt up to ash.
Oh, how it burns! I have not long to live,
The world reels round me, the sky fades, I fall—
Helena, help me. Helena, I cannot see.

He sways and covers his face. HELENA supports him

HELENA: Lay him upon the couch. The fit will
pass.

These first outpourings of his vehemence
Are like the opening of a turbulent spring

That after flows more gently.

They help him to the couch and lay him on it

NURSE: Dearest master,
You know me, your old servant.

LEO: Are you here?
Are you the last one left? Is not my palace
Already empty and deserted?

HELENA: No,
All are still here.

NURSE: How bloodshot are his eyes!

HELENA: Go fetch him drink.

NURSE: I rather will bring help,
Lest in his madness he grow violent.

HELENA: Do as I bid you, go and fetch him drink.
He will not hurt us.

The NURSE goes out

LEO: Closer, Helena,
Come closer to my side and I will tell you—
All powers, all graces, all authorities
Are changed and given into other hands.
Behind the sky Satan hath fought his battle
And God is beaten and the Seraphim,
Such as are faithful, haste His desperate flight
Down the steep slopes of Heaven and tend His
wounds,

Mop the dark blood that trickles from His flesh
With their long hair.

And Satan's charger neighs in Paradise,
And welcoming angels gather round the fiend
To proffer him their duty. O, what we see
Here on the earth is only a pale image

Of what they now transact in Paradise.
What we have suffered here is nothing, nothing—
That I have fallen, that I have lost my honours,
Only a copy of celestial things,
Nothing that I who was the Chancellor,
Am scourged with rods and mocked by my own
guards

As though I had stolen onions from a stall.
There is no loyalty left, no truth, no trust,
No star immovable in certainty
That any man may steer by—or any woman.

HELENA: Ah me, my ruined father! O my lord,
Cease thus to rub this poison in your wounds
But rather let us with our care, our love,
Pour balsam on the hurt.

LEO (*sitting up and speaking more calmly*): I am a
fool.

What is my ruin in the whirl of things?
For I am old and my best years are gone,
And I at least have strutted in the light
And the pleasant breath of power. But you, my
daughter—

Listen, Helena, listen with forgiveness—
Be strong to bear what time begets on you,
For it shall not be David's child.

HELENA: Not David's!

LEO: Think you that now he will be glad to wed
The daughter of a poor and broken man?
Alas, my child, forgive me for this wrong,
As I shall not forgive. What I have been
I must regret for you. You cannot now
Love me again as you were used to love,
For I have spoilt your youth. All, all is gone,

My pride, my pomp, my power, dashed in the dust,
And with them too your happiness and love.
I am a fallen tree, whose rotten trunk
The heart revolts from and would fain forget,
But you're a flower, sweet still in scent and beauty,
Cast in the road and heedless trampled on,
And there's the greater pity.

HELENA

David is true!

Pity me not, it is an evil omen,
Pity me not, I know, I know he loves me,
Pity me not, he must not hear your doubt—
O, if some echo of your doubt should drift
Along the streets and light within his ear,
How faithless he would hold us!

LEO:

But his father—

Curse neither of them, disaster is too strong.
They both must needs desert me. All their fortune
Hangs now on Jacob's nod.

AARON has entered unseen

AARON:

My injured friend!

LEO (*springing to his feet*): Aaron!

AARON:

Alas, alas, the heavy news!

I hardly dared to face you.

LEO:

O my friend!

AARON: Weep not, but let the will of God be
done.

Who are we two, that even at our age
We should imagine that we might have seen
All the strange miracles of life performed
And nothing left to amaze us?

LEO:

Had I said

That nothing strange remained for us to see,

Now I'd recant. What miracle of friendship
Has brought you, Aaron, to the stricken bull
Whom the wise herd desert?

AARON:

A miracle?

Life is a miracle, and death, and love,
And the smallest word that issues from man's
mouth,

For we are wonderful creatures. Be not amazed:
This is not more than these.

LEO:

Then God still reigns,

Still at His side the faithful angels fight,
And victory is in dispute in heaven.

Aaron, I am a man

Whose soul is founded on a base of pride
Which shaken there is nothing left to me.

I cannot live save in the good esteem

And honour of my fellows. And to-day

I have been disgraced, whipped like a paltry rogue,
Cast over by the fool I most despised.

Aaron, you know me, you have known my deeds

These twenty years and more. Say, could I not

A dozen times have made the throne my own,

Blinded the king, exiled his family,

And reigned in peace? And still I held my hand

For loyalty. O, that's a foolish virtue!

Show it not, Aaron, but desert me too.

AARON: I will not, Leo.

LEO: And David and my daughter?

AARON: For my part, they shall wed as soon as
may be.

He burns for her faithfully, and he sees
Nought else in all the world.

LEO:

But have you thought

How all your fortune rests at this man's will?
You dare not anger him, you dare not join
Alliance with the man whom he must still
Both hate and fear.

AARON: I dare do and I shall.
Leo, in all your lifetime have you known
That ever I defaulted from my word
In notes of hand, or goods, or monies promised
To traders or my king? Then how much more
In this impalpable and priceless gold
Of friendship must I keep my plighted oath?

LEO: You are my friend, and I in your opinion
Will hold my head as high as I have held it
In all the world's.

AARON: Helena, yours the task
To soothe your father and to comfort him.
This will be your last service done to him;
Soon you will be my daughter and David's wife.

HELENA: My lord, by the love and care I owe my
father,
I'll weigh the love and duty that are yours.

ANDREW *enters*

ANDREW: My business is with Leo, lately
Chancellor.

LEO: You were my clerk and bore my pens. You
know me:

Come you from my supplanter?

ANDREW: The lord Jacob,
Who is now my master, sends to you his friendship
And sends therewith a message in my mouth.

LEO: Speak on then. What says Jacob?

ANDREW: He bade me say

That well he knows what thoughts do swell your heart,

And that for those are wrathful and treasonable,
Intending hurt to him or to the King,
He has taken proper guard and you shall find,
If you are mutinous and hate the whip,
Like a trapped scorpion a ring of fire
Wherein 'twere best for you to sting yourself
And make an end. But for those harmless thoughts,
Shame and regret and fear of things to come,
He pities you, knowing how hard it is
To be a beggar, starving and despised.
And therefore, if your heart is meek and lowly,
Wisely submissive to the will of God,
He will be your friend and mollify the King,
On one condition.

LEO (*with difficulty*): Tell me the terms.

ANDREW: Since he is rich but has no family,
No wife nor children for his age's comfort,
He seeks some virgin of a noble blood
To share his heart, his greatness and his couch,
And among all the maidens of the city
His choice upon your daughter falls.

HELENA (*softly*): Dear God!

LEO: Dares he——

ANDREW: Stop, sir! I am to bid you ponder.
Jacob is wise, tender and merciful,
And will not take a hasty, harsh reply
But rather waits the mellow fruit of reason.

LEO: My daughter is betrothed to Aaron's son
And no delay can make it otherwise.

(To AARON): You kept your loyalty to me and I
Will not betray it.

AARON: We are firm in this.

ANDREW: Now I perform the next part of my errand,

Which has some meaning in the first. You are Aaron the merchant?

AARON: You have said my name.

ANDREW: I have a charge to you.

AARON: From Jacob too?

ANDREW: From the Chancellor. He bids me greet you kindly.

Out of old love and brotherly affection,
And say: I am ashamed, being so great,
To owe the veriest trifle to a man
So poor, so lately robbed of pride and hope,
As Aaron is, now I am grown so great,
And therefore I return his latest gift,
Seeing that he may find a use for it,
This begging-bowl.

He gives the bowl to AARON

AARON (*pale and trembling*): The begging-bowl.
Ah, God!

He lets it fall

ANDREW: Lord Leo, in a calmer hour I hope
To ask your answer to my lord. Farewell!

ANDREW goes out

HELENA: Aaron, what troubles you? This tells
again

It is a beggar and a madman reigns.
There's nothing worse in this than we have feared.

AARON: Ah, God, dear God! Look, what a trap
is life!

The bowl, the begging-bowl. And I am come
Nigh upon seventy years and I am rich
And full of honours. Ah, the bowl, the bowl. . . .

HELENA: Aaron, my lord! He stares astray, his
eyes

Turn upward in the lids and show the whites
Swollen with angry veins.

LEO (*striding up and down*): This insolent!
His words come like a breath of tainted air
Out of the slums and nauseate my nostrils.
Yet they have done me a service, filliped me
To active anger again.

Aaron, if you and I stand side by side,
We can unseat this beggar.

AARON: O my friend,
You know not what you say. He is a devil.
I am unmanned, I dare not join with you.
Seventy years of honour, and the grave
Must take my torn and mutilated corpse,
For all is over.

LEO: What are these wild words?

AARON: All's over, all our friendship, our
alliance,
The marriage that we planned we must relinquish.
Let us give up as easily as we may
These toys of our last hours. Now let us part,
Now better while we still have tongues to speak,
For in the grave, whither we hasten fast,
We shall be separate, and friendship there
Shall count as nothing. Wind up our affairs
And let us go, each to his lonely doom,
Waste no more life in vain intrigue and toil,
Give up while there is time.

LEO: Aaron, you rave!

AARON: My brain at least is sound. I know this man.

LEO: The beggar?

AARON: Yes. The beggar is my brother.

LEO: Your brother?

AARON: We were young together once
And then I followed him and worshipped him.
The swamps that Jack-a-lantern led me through
Would sicken you to hear of. Still I followed,
Admiring how he bore himself in all
The town's adventures, through intrigues and
brawls,

And strove to copy him. Until one night,
Sitting together in a greasy tavern,
He overcome with wine, I not so much,
He bragged to me of all his evil deeds,
Set what I knew in a more wicked light,
And told me much I knew not of. That night
I staggered home alone, drunk with despair
Rather than liquor. All through the dark hours
Those ghastly shadows stalked across my brain,
The ruined men, the girls betrayed, the wife
Seduced and left to meet her husband's vengeance,
The trusting widow robbed of wealth and honour
By Jacob's feint of love. A dozen times
That night I left my couch in shaking terror,
Sweating and staring through the unfriendly dark,
Like a lost traveller who halts upon
The narrow crumbling edge of an abyss,
Which he has found, he fears, too late for safety.
Thenceforward I forsook his company.
Leo, you know me only since that day,

But tell me—since you have known me, have I not
Followed the laws of God, have I not ever
Striven in charity for the poor and fallen?
All that I did was to redeem my crime
In having been my brother's fellow. Thrice,
When I was prosperous, he came to me,
Begging for money, and three times I gave
More than enough to live upon in honour.
The fourth time he came whining to my door
He had a ten thousand florins in a week,
Purchasing who can tell what wickedness,
And looking forth upon him unobserved
I saw those shadows moving in his eyes,
His red-rimmed cruel eyes, those ghastly shadows
Of murdered goodness. . . . My cured blood re-
volved

And in my anger then I swore an oath
To make him one gift and the last. I sent him
By a slave's hand, this bowl, this begging-bowl,
Which he returns in mockery to me.

LEO (*bewildered*): I have no words to say.

AARON: There are no words,

Let silence be the end. Leo, farewell.

I would have joined you against man or devil,
Not against Jacob. Now we meet no more.

I know not whether death will take me soon
Or if I must drag out my life in woe.

But, Leo, think, my son. . . . This fate may spare
My son if I am prudent. Never say
A word again of what we planned for him.
All that is over.

He goes out, LEO following him

LEO: Aaron, listen, Aaron. . . .

He goes out. The NURSE returns

NURSE: I did not dare break in on you. But
now——

HELENA (*tonelessly*): Lead the lord David from
his hiding-place
And take him quickly hence.

She turns away and stands motionless

NURSE (*in a stealthy voice*): Come out, my lord,
And follow me this way.

DAVID *comes out from behind the curtain and goes*
to HELENA

DAVID: My love, my love,
All I have heard dismayed me not so much
As now to hear the music in your voice
Lost, and to see you standing thus averse.
Look up, my love. We are young, and courage
still

Yearns in our hearts more than our elders know.

NURSE: Vain words! O, now the woe I pro-
phesied,
The woe I brought upon my fosterling,
Descends and all is ruin.

HELENA: Vain, vain words!
Let the forefated woe strike me alone.
Go, David, go. You have no part in me.
Yet we exchanged our loves, wherefor I thank
Gladly the heaven that strikes me now.

DAVID: Not yet
Heaven turns against us, for our earnest given

Claims a full joy to come. I leave you now
Only to hasten to my father's house
And there to put new courage in his heart.
I shall not fail, for love is stronger much
Than all the devils in my uncle's breast,
Look up, Helena, look on me.

HELENA: O David,
If anything a virgin may bestow
Can give you double strength, ask it of me.
Or rather I will offer. Take my lips.

*As they embrace, the NURSE at the door becomes
agitated*

NURSE: You too must fly, child. Hither I see
coming
The devil-beggar with his train behind him.
Come to your father quickly.

DAVID: I shall wait
And see my devil-uncle and the devils
He brings along behind him on his way.
Go, dearest love, I'll come to you again.

HELENA: Good-bye, my dear, until we meet
again.

*They embrace again, and HELENA and the NURSE
slip out at the side. The BEGGAR, followed by
ANDREW and others, comes in at the main en-
trance. DAVID stands at the side of the door and
they pass him*

BEGGAR: This was the room where Leo kept his
women,
These were their silks, their cushions, here his girl

Prayed, sang, embroidered, used her father's riches.

Still a sweet perfume hangs upon the air
That makes me dizzy. . . . O the luxury!
The table's set indeed, but where's the dish?
Where is the girl? No matter! she will come.
This cushion did support her head and now
How black my fingers leave their printing on it!
Would she not shudder to see? This room is mine.
I like their soft silks, like to wipe my face
With hangings and embroideries they worked
In hours of delicate and idle toil.
I cannot have too much of ease. I'll take
Ten years' back-pay of luxury to-night.
They owe me that.

He catches sight of DAVID

Who is that fellow there?

Are you among my servants?

DAVID:

No, I am not.

BEGGAR: But would be of them? Come, I like
your face,

You shall be my familiar, I will teach you
Much that you dream not even can be known,
For I know men—and women. Come to me
And let me put this collar on your neck
That honours you and marks you for my service.
What is your name?

DAVID: Jacob, my name is David.

BEGGAR (*starting to his feet*): My nephew?

DAVID: I am Aaron's son.

BEGGAR: His son?

Born and brought up with pride upon your lip,

No care, no anguish and no poverty
To make you awkward. It's no miracle
That you are handsome and stand up so well,
But misery could change that soon enough.

DAVID: I stayed to see you: I have seen. Fare-
well!

BEGGAR: Go not so soon from me. I like you,
David.

You have a touch of me when I'd your age,
Not like your crawling father. Stay with me.
You cannot have the girl, but all besides
That you desire I'll give you. Women love you,
And I will show you how to get your fill
And never risk a penny or your freedom.
I will be as your father.

DAVID: Let me go!
The gold robe covers half your dirt and sores
But not an inch of your most filthy heart.

BEGGAR: Aaron and I were friends, when I was
young
And handsome as you now, and in his house
I spent my happiest hours. How do you know
That I am not your father?

DAVID: Let me go!

He flings out of the room

BEGGAR: Stop him! No, let the wretched boy
escape.

These are but ghosts, Aaron, David and Leo,
That with the rising sun must slink away,
And now my sun is risen. This gold robe
Impedes the light and heat. I'll tear it off
And with my naked flesh enjoy the beams.

Andrew, order the feast, and you, my friends,
Feast here with me to-night. These silks and
hangings

Are for our pleasure, not to be used with care.
Do with them what you will. Do as I do.

He has torn off his golden robe of office, showing himself half-naked in his rags, and now he gathers cushions and pulls down curtains to lie on. As the others follow his example, the

Curtain falls

FOURTH SCENE

A room in another and smaller house belonging to

LEO. LEO and ANDREW discovered.

ANDREW: This morning hour is wisdom's, good
my lord.

Will you now answer what my lord desires?

LEO: I have conned all night your message, and
I find

No answer ready.

ANDREW: I must at once be gone.

Much business waits me and a press of letters.

LEO: Does then your master set to work so early?

ANDREW: He worked all night with dishes and
with cups

And now he sleeps. But he has ordered me

To do what petty business must be done

And answer all requests as I think fit.

LEO: I did not so.

ANDREW: You did not, sir.

LEO: I see

You speak more mildly than before.

ANDREW: Dear lord,

I spoke with you according to my book

And even then erased some passages.

To-day I come without instruction, speaking

Even as my heart suggests.

LEO: Your head, perhaps?

ANDREW: Even so, my lord. You know me.

LEO: Very well,

And I can read a little in your eyes.

Deal with me plainly, fellow. I am Leo,

Whether disgraced or honoured.

ANDREW: I have seen
This Chancellor one day dispose his charge
And now no fear of him nor policy
Shall hinder me from showing you the love
That dwells within me.

LEO: Crack the nut and show
The heart of reason.

ANDREW: I have watched and seen
Stirring in Jacob's heart the very stuff
The man is made of. He's a beggar yet,
Angry, suspicious, and improvident,
Grasping with one hand, flinging with the other,
Now cringing in forgetfulness, then strutting
In conscious pomp to show his new estate,
And then reminding us that he has suffered
The pangs of indigence. He sits among
The pleasures of his lordly house as though
Some wizard should have touched his filthy hole,
Transforming it and leaving him the same.
Last night he summoned me to drink with him,
And gave me his own cup, wherein an amethyst
Gleamed at the bottom and assured the drink,
And then with fiery eyes and clawing hands
Plucked at my wrist before the draught was down,
Bidding me not to cheat a fellow-topper
By taking all at once.

LEO: You counsel me. . . .

ANDREW: Serve as the wind blows for a little while:

It will not be for long.

LEO: And so you come
To take my answer back?

ANDREW: Thereon depends
All of your fortune. Jacob holds his place
A week, a month, or half a year maybe,
And then the end will come, and then your turn,
If still you live.

LEO: If still I live. . . . And so
You bid me bend, send back a supple answer . . .

ANDREW: The other way is death. This man is
foolish,
But swift in action and as ruinous
As desert sand-storms that destroy the crops
On the unshielded edge of our best lands.
Be his fall ne'er so certain, while he rules
In half an hour he may stamp out your house,
And should he after fall, and should he die
In lengthy torment of the stake or wheel,
How would that help you?

LEO: So you bid me bend
And give a cunning answer to the beggar,
Promise to him my daughter . . . for a week. . . .

ANDREW: O, promise all that ever he desires.
It is the price of safety.

LEO: But not pay?

ANDREW: O, pay, my lord, pay anything but
life.

For at your death he can take what he will.
Deny him nothing.

LEO: Deny not even my child,

A week, a month, or half a year . . . my daughter . . .
This low, scabbed beggar, sitting in my seat. . . .

ANDREW: Lord, take my counsel!

LEO:

Silence! In my heart

Rise the old powers, the old longings fume and
steam,

But in the cauldron's murk I see a face
Most like the face of her I loved in youth,
Whose life this daughter took from me, whose
voice

Now whispers in the chambers of my mind.
I cannot. Yet were I dead, there I am grappled,
What were the profit? Riddle-making God,
Why are Your traps so difficult? You, fellow,
You know this beggar—did he covet your child,
Your wife perhaps. . . . No, silence! In this hour,
No man can counsel me.

There is a long pause

It shall be done.

Silence, again! Your cunning commendation
Were wormwood in the poison. What I do,
I know and count the cost, whereof you are
ignorant.

I'll fetch my daughter now and you shall hear me
Announce my will to her. Then, silent still,
Leave us and tell your master.

He claps his hand and the NURSE enters

Bring my daughter.

She bows, goes out, and returns with HELENA

My child, I have decided on your life.

Since David and his father have renounced you,
My mind is opened to another match
Which in the new strange turn and whirl of things
Greatly advantages me, and shall to you
Preserve the former honours you enjoyed.
In short, you are contracted soon to wed
Jacob the Chancellor.

HELENA (*faintly*): The beggar? . . . Father!

LEO: Speak of your husband with more reverence,

Due to your lord and to the kingdom's lord.
Fellow, you know what message to repeat.
Go quickly. Stay not in mine eyes, but go,
For if you linger, I shall change . . . or die. . . .

ANDREW *bows and goes out*

HELENA: I have not understood.

LEO: How should a woman
Judge wisely on a grave affair of state
Or even determine her own fortunes wisely?
My word is spoken, daughter, and despatched
Even now to your betrothed.

HELENA (*wailing*): Oh, no, no, no!

LEO: Be modest, girl. I would not think your heart

Inclines to David, whom you have not seen,
Or, moved by lust indecent in your age,
To any young man, choosing greedily,
Rather than following with decent wisdom
Your father's choice of one more fit to wed
And cherish you. You, woman, see to her.

He goes out

NURSE: O my heart, my dearest heart,
My love, my dove, come hither in my arms
And put your head against my sunken breast.
Hush, hush, no tears—

HELENA: I am not weeping, nurse.
My tears, my blood, all natural movements are
Stayed in my body, and the still breeding mind
Lies like an empty mirror. Is this death?

NURSE: O cry, my pretty, let your tears have
way.

HELENA: Whatever I may do, you bid the other.
That is the world's way, nurse, is it not?
I wonder what is David doing now.
Is he cajoled from what he would?

NURSE: My sweet,
Think on the glories that await you now,
For at your age the past is gray and shrunken
And the future swells with beauty and with hope.

HELENA: You laugh at me. Does any one, I
wonder,
Laugh now at David, bidding him consider
How good it is to be a bachelor,
How men, unknowing, marry termagants,
How the fair'st wife sours on the husband's palate?
It is early, nurse. The sun is hardly risen
Above the tall crown of the tree out there.
How shall we spend the day till dinner-time?
Now you can show me how I should unravel
The knot I made in broidering yesterday—
Yesterday—before David came. You remember,
I made the knot and would no more of it
But cast the pattern and my needles down,
And then we talked of David. Do not weep,

Dear nurse, for soon enough my tears will flow.
 Now I am dumb. Let me not lose the hours
 I still may spend in peace. But David still
 Stands here before me and I feel no longing,
 No sorrow, though his image thrusts upon
 My listless eyes, clearer than you do, nurse,
 Only there is no pity in his face,
 No sorrow on his mouth or in his glance,
 But calm, calm, calm—calm as my heart beats
 now——

NURSE: What is that noise upon the balcony?

HELENA: I heard no sound.

NURSE: A scraping at the window . . .

HELENA: Open the lattice.

*The NURSE opens and DAVID jumps down into
 the room*

Have the dreams begun
 That will torment my mind and make a waste
 Of doubtful shapes that mingle truth and lies
 Instead of the real world?

DAVID: Love, it is I!

HELENA (*rising*): Oh, David. . . .

She goes into his arms

DAVID: Hush! your father's in the house,
 And there are slaves below whom I evaded.

NURSE: Why have you come to her?

DAVID: To offer her
 What she still has, if she remembers it,
 A poor and all unmemorable gift—
 My love.

HELENA: But that is done. The word is passed.

You and your father bow beneath the storm.
My father hath accepted it, and gives me
To Jacob.

DAVID: These are empty policies,
The unwholesome scab that age leaves upon life,
When the blood grows thin and is corruptible.
We are young and lovers still.

HELENA: But division hath
Severed our loves.

DAVID: Mine's grafted still on yours,
Whether you regard it or not.

HELENA: These are sweet words,
That have an aftertaste of bitterness.
David, how can it profit us to change
These empty speeches? Loud we may protest,
Aye, and my heart will cry as loud as yours,
That we are loyal. But the careless world
Will brush our oaths away unratified.
We should as soon to the huge desert-lion
Bravely proclaim we are invincible.
The end's the same.

DAVID: Have you no courage, love?
Almost the words that shaped so easily,
I so believed in them, fail upon my lips.
Will you desert me?

HELENA: You must desert me, David.
I pity you, as I pity my own life
That must be waste henceforward.

DAVID: Come with me,
Waste are the lands that we shall travel through,
Yet blossomed by our love and not so waste
As life without this spiritual flower.

HELENA: David. . . .

DAVID: O, I will guard you through the desert
And fight for you, whether with men or beasts.
I am a soldier.

HELENA: And you'll use your sword
On beasts, and to protect our hunted lives
As outlaws, when that lucky blade should lead you
To honour and to greatness. There is none,
Like you, my father says, in all the city,
Born to command and be a mighty prince.

DAVID: Honour has left the city, it's outside,
Gone through the gates, poor honour, to the
desert,

Where we will seek it. I have loved my duty,
As you have loved your father and your home,
And I have dreamt of service and renown,
But not for a vile place where love and loyalty
Are counted vices. Now on us it falls
To save this stray of broken lovely things
Left to our people. All the rest is worthless.

HELENA: You bid me come with you?

DAVID: I offer you
Love, and then, love, and nothing else but danger.
I have considered, Helena, all the night
What I should say, what do, whether I'd vanquish
This love that seeks to drag you wandering out
Into the waste, to scar your tender feet
And make their soft palms callous, that would give
Your flesh to rocks and thorns and sun and frost.
All the night long I lay, debating this,
And I am resolute. For, loving you,
I offer you this fate.

NURSE: O, Helena,
My dear, my charge, consider ere you answer,

And you, young man, do you consider too.
You love her and you'd take her into danger,
To want and death perhaps. But if she stays
She shall be honoured and cherished all her life,
And if she goes away from those who love her,
Who will protect her after you are killed?
And I—and I shall see her not again.

HELENA: David, you hear. Remember, you are a
man,

Hardy and brave and used to enterprise.
I am a woman, softly reared and taught,
Accustomed (she will tell you) to cry out
When with a needle's point my skin is pricked.
You ask too much, I cannot come with you.

DAVID. Now I am strengthened, now I do
demand

That you shall come with me, for I can see
That only love withholds you. Would you else
Accuse yourself of cowardice who have
A soul of courage, firm and strong and hard
As on the outward you are tender and sweet?
Love, I have read your heart and know your secret
And by that power I can command your life.

HELENA: Love, I will follow as you shall com-
mand.

Unfold to me your will.

NURSE:

O stay, for here

You shall be cherished.

HELENA:

In the beggar's arms?

And owe to him my duty?

DAVID:

This afternoon

Beneath your window I will wait for you,
When all the slaves in gross sleep overcome

The less will hear us.

HELENA: Gently call my name
And I will come.

DAVID: Then by the Northern Gate,
Whose keeper is my friend, we can escape,
Thence, through the wood outside the city walls,
A three days' journey comes to Trebizond.
But we shall have the trackers at our heels
And perilous woods and wastes to travel through.
It is a slender chance I offer you.

HELENA: Gladly I take it.

DAVID: Till the hour, farewell!

HELENA: Farewell, my love, until the hour,
farewell!

The Curtain falls

FIFTH SCENE

The same as in the Third Scene. All is now in a state of great disorder and uncleanness. ANDREW shows in LEO and AARON.

LEO: This in a day, and all the state like this!
Why has your master sent for us?

ANDREW: My lord,
I do not know. His order only said
That you should here await his present coming
Among his officers and other suitors.

AARON: Does he intend us evil?

LEO: Still your fears.
He hates us. Let him not by any sign,
More than our needful plotting shall impose,
Read that we dread him. Should a real terror
Invade your heart, our purposes are lost.

ANDREW: I am not in place to tell you what my
master

Intends you, if I knew it. I am to say
He is the wise and merciful dispenser
Of the King's will, whose servants are we all.
I am sure he means no evil to the loyal.

LEO: I could have said so much. Indeed, I think
That I first put the speech into your mouth.
Henceforward when we visit in this house
Tell us the first three words of the harangue

And we shall know the rest.

ANDREW: My lord, I beg
Your leave to depart.

LEO: Go. Go.

ANDREW *goes out*

Look up, man. Fear should now be only feigned,
And that only when there is one to watch.
Cringe not unless we thereby somehow can
Gain any profit. Cringing eats the soul
And leaves a husk of man for enterprise.

AARON: I am afeared. My soul is eaten up,
My will dissolved in acid of this trial.
I was not gold. O, leave me, Leo, leave me,
I fail you now, I am no fit companion
For any man who still can carry sail
Under this storm.

LEO: But I will convoy you,
Dismasted body of a gallant ship,
Into shoal water by a pleasant shore.
I have not taken my old canvas down
Of mastery and honesty and pride,
Fitted these jury-sails of treachery
And truckling and submission and deceit,
To leave you rolling in the hungry wave.
Play the next move, 'tis easy, and then see—
Your heart will go as far.

AARON: I have no heart.
I am a shell, a loathsome husk encrusted
With all the black excrescences of terror
And, inside, emptiness.

LEO: You have thrown the reins
On panic's neck and ride unheeding on

To the abyss. But, Aaron, look at me,
See what I dare. Not only do I venture
To set my skill against the beggar's luck,
But thereon stake my honesty, my pride,
My daughter's happiness and honour, all
That yesterday I prized in all the world.

AARON: But I, a ruined gamester, I have thrown
All that I had away. Why did I not
Keep him from beggary? O, tempt me not,
Nay rather, trouble me not, I am not tempted,
Who have no natural faculties to tickle.
Leave me to find such end as best I can.

LEO: But, Aaron, I am still a man of deeds,
Apt as you knew me once for plan and action.
Have you not, in the years that now are dust,
Backed with your treasure my rash enterprise,
Put all your fortune on a throw of mine
To make it twice or lose it? Well I know
How once you stripped your house of plate, your
wife

Of jewels, only to make up the amount.
And now I ask you for a look, a smile,
At most, and at the least I ask your patience
To let me work.

AARON: I am bankrupt even of this.

LEO: Ah, God, if any man could shake me now
That would you! For the gambler's dying throw,
Must all the resolution come from me
That I have need of? Would the cards were played
That I might see the end! A darkness grows,
Aaron, from your reluctance that obscures
My faintly glimmering ember of resolve.
I am *that* Leo—aye, and I have stooped

To lies that stain the tongue, and I have pledged
Flesh and blood, my own darling flesh and blood,
To further such deep ends as fear the light.
Where am I borne? How can I marvel now
That all grows dark around me, for my path
Is like a traveller's, who with fading light
Comes to the last edge of the pleasant plain,
And, as his guide in heaven begins to fail,
Sinks deep and deeper in a gloomy gorge,
Where the vague track is by his eyes unseen
And doubtful to his feet, where in the shadows
Flowers are like eyes and bushes seem like men
And stones astonish him to stammering.
And should I falter, should I lose my way
Or lose my reason in this ghast ravine,
Not mine, but my child's life must pay the price!
Thus stands a merchant racked, who has entrusted
More than his charge allowed of others' goods
Into a frail and perilous adventure,
Thus stands he on the shore and sees his ship
Struck by more gales than nature should command,
Thrown on uncharted sands, wrecked by mis-
chance.

I fear me, Aaron, what the end may be.
Heaven hates the man that doth misuse his trust
And to secure his keener punishment
Strikes harder those whose trust he has betrayed.
I fear me much for Helena. Do you not
Wake at that name? Is then all care for David
Gone with the rest? He loved her, and young men
Take love of women hardly.

AARON: Be you pleased,
Sir, to excuse me. I am quit of affairs,

An old man living out his life in private,
Willing that others shall dispose of him.
David this morning gave to me my quittance
Of duty and of love, and we exchanged
Our mutual obligations back again.

LEO: I fear me for Helena. If one should use
A splinter of the Holy Cross for pledge,
Given in surety to the infidel,
Would God make thrive the bargain? My heart
tells me

A cloudy tale of woe, like distant voices,
Crying, crying, crying, I know not what,
But there is death and ruin in the sound.

AARON: Leo, Leo, compose your looks and leave
This unprofitable, violent lamentation.
Stand further back and be not seen too soon.
The Chancellor is coming, my brother's coming.

*JACOB enters in state, followed by ANDREW, the
TREASURER, the PREFECT, and others. He seats
himself in a chair on a dais. LEO stands forward*

LEO: Long live your lordship, with the people's
blessing!

JACOB: I thank you, thank you for that greeting.

(To ANDREW) Tell me,
What meant he, saying, "With the people's
blessing"?

Did he intend a cunning reservation,
Deducted from his duty?

ANDREW: No, my lord.
It is the usual form, as you will learn.

JACOB: Let him mean me no evil. Did he so,
Even unwillingly and with the furthest

And darkest inch of his heart, I'd have it out.
I'll have no treachery. What is the business?

ANDREW: It is upon these tablets writ, my lord,
To summon first the Prefect of the City
And ask him of his duty.

JACOB: So it is.
Let him be called.

ANDREW: Stand out, your Excellency,
My lord would speak with you.

PREFECT: I am here, my lord.
What is your will with me?

JACOB: Have you performed
All I commanded?

(To ANDREW) What did I command him?
'Tis here so spiderish and ungainly writ
I cannot read the first small word.

ANDREW: You ordered
That he should bid his men throughout the city
Salute whatever beggars they might meet
Duly with ceremony and reverence
Such as for prospering persons was reserved.
This order gave you me with your own mouth:
It is not there set down.

JACOB: You say it truly.
How patly you remember! Come, my memory,
Stand closer to my ear and hand. You, fellow,
Did you my bidding?

PREFECT: Sir, I am no fellow.
I ask the ceremony that I give,
Not these uncouth, unseemly words.

JACOB: Dear Heaven!
Who speaks to me? Do I stand ignorant
In the awful presence of our lord the King?

Memory, tell me.

ANDREW: Sir, this is a man,
Held as a worthy officer, whose rank
Is high as his deserving.

JACOB: I've no measure
To gauge the one or other. Tell me then,
Most worthy officer, what I commanded
Is it performed?

PREFECT: I gave my men the word.

ANDREW: That is enough.

JACOB: Enough: stand down, you man.
What is the next?

ANDREW: The Treasurer. Stand forth!

TREASURER: I am here, my lord.

JACOB: Hark how his jangling keys
Ring with the sound of gold instead of iron,
Transmuted by the company they keep!

ANDREW (*whispering*): This is, my lord, the
officer of state

Next to yourself, and much to be esteemed.

JACOB: What, does the memory speak unasked?
Be silent,

I know these officers and all their ranks.

(*To the* TREASURER) I bade you reckon all the
minted money

That in your keeping lies, and to compute
How many suits of silk, how many feasts,
Flute-players, dancing-girls, and downy beds
To sleep the feasts away, it would provide.
Have you then made the calculation?

TREASURER: Yea,
Here is the scroll, my lord, although I know not
Whereto you have desired it. Heavily

The charges of the state have drained my store
Which lies at a low ebb, with wars and forays
And soldiers eating up the solid gold.

And now to-day a new complaint comes in——

JACOB: A new complaint? Are there not old
enough?

TREASURER: How down the river in the lower
fields

A dam has burst and water flooded in,
The crops destroyed, the houses washed away;
And the poor people sit on crumbling hills
Or shivering idly cruise in little boats
Above their wave-washed homesteads. And they
pray

Money for this, money to mend the dam,
And buy them food, and huts, and tools, and seed,
And make them happy as they were before.
God knows, my lord, my heart bewails their fate,
And yet—here's their petition that I hold—
And yet, before I give it you, I beg you
Look at it warily. It's writ so fair,
So cunning, yet so plain, that human eyes
Must needs drop water on it. But our dearth
Forbids that we should send them any help.
Bear it in mind, your lordship, as you read,
We cannot help them.

*He offers the paper, which JACOB with a violent
gesture rejects*

JACOB: Tear the paper up!
God with His finger pushed the dam aside,
As with His finger me He placed in power.
Since God intended this calamity

'Twere blasphemous to mend it, as it were
 If you, or you, or you should raise your hands
 To push me from the place I hold. But here
 I have a key to happiness for those
 Who have suffered their lives long, a talisman
 That shall undo the strictest bonds of fate.
 Think then no more upon the lucky folk
 Who, as you tell me, dwelt in houses, tilled
 The fertile fields and brought forth golden corn,
 Having wives, perhaps, and children at their
 hearths,

And fires to warm their flesh, and beds for sleep.
 Why should we pity them? For they have known
 Comfort and plenty and a sheltered rest
 And easy stomachs, day on happy day,
 Till God observed their joy and wickedness.
 But these I speak for, lean and starved and cold,
 Unhoused and friendless, drag their lives in

woe,

As I have done——

ANDREW (*whispering*): They stare at you, my
 lord,

They do not understand you.

JACOB:

If they could,

Long since there were no beggars in the city.
 Listen, all you, how think you I came here?
 I, by whose empty bowl you passed and passed
 With hands unmoved towards your pockets?

Now

God has exalted me for no small reason—
 That justice may be done. Too long you waited,
 Forgetful of the hungry at your gate,
 And now the hungry sit in seats of power

And mean to be fed full. Lord Treasurer,
Here is my order signed. Take it, and read.

*He flings a paper on the ground before the TREASURER,
who picks it up*

TREASURER (*slowly*): This is no order . . . what
. . . I cannot read it. . . .

So scrawled upon a dirty scrap of parchment—

JACOB: Trouble your puffy eyes to make it out
And then perform exactly what I bid.

No questioning! The miracle that raised me
Ceased not at that, the miracle continues.

My brain, my voice, are not as other men's

And will not be gainsaid. I am elected

That God His purpose may be here performed.

Hinder me not, it would be blasphemy!

You, fattened statesmen, have a lifetime spent

In prudence and benevolence, and nourished

All the good citizens just not so fat.

I am not so, I am sent to make a change.

See my lean hand and arm, and learn from them

I am the friend of those whom none has pitied!

Read, my lord Treasurer, read, and then perform.

*The TREASURER pores in a bewildered manner over
the paper. JACOB stares round the room*

Is the man Leo here? Let him stand forth.

LEO: Lord Chancellor, I am here.

JACOB:

You sent to me

To-day a wiser message than yesterday.

LEO: Having considered, I answered.

JACOB:

Better so!

When will the girl be ready?

LEO: There must be
An interval——

JACOB: I'll have no interval!
You whose long life is filled with deeds and
pleasure

May dream of pauses when you're growing old,
But all my life has been a long attendance
Upon this moment, and I have no time.
We'll say to-morrow. Is the girl prepared?

LEO: Imagine, sir, the shock, the hesitation
Becoming in a maiden——

JACOB: That she should be,
And innocent, I hope. They say of her
That she is fresh and sweet as a ripe fruit,
Ready for picking, but yet never handled.

LEO: Sir, you speak strangely of my daughter.

JACOB: Strangely!
And strangely may she take my first caresses,
But I will teach her, I am not unskilled.

LEO (*muttering*): Were it but my own life——

TREASURER (*breaking in*): You have given me,
My lord, some paper you did not intend.
This is no order, but a random scribbling
That means I know not what.

JACOB: You have made it out?

TREASURER: Give me the right command, and I
will hasten
To put it into action.

JACOB: Read the order.

TREASURER: But this, my lord, is not the——

JACOB: Read it out

TREASURER (*reading*): "All gold that lies within
the Treasury

Upon a given hour to be conveyed
To the Great Gate, thence strewn upon the street,
The beggars first being warned." Then it is
signed

By what, my lord, I take to be your name,
But it's obscurely written.

JACOB: Truly signed!
Perform, perform!

TREASURER: But this is not in earnest, this is only
Last night's jocosity——

JACOB'S *attention has wandered to a ragged and
filthy* BEGGAR, *who stands in the doorway*

JACOB: To my side, my friend!
The second, you, of all of us, to enter
The rich man's house, but others shall come after.
Here to my side, that I may honour you.

*He goes half-way across the room to greet the
BEGGAR, takes him by the hand and leads him to
a seat next to his own chair of state*

And what's the news with us? Good news, I hope.

BEGGAR (*hoarsely*): Sir, I must whisper, do not let
them hear us.

JACOB: Stand off a little way, and do not listen.

*He leans over to the BEGGAR and they whisper
together confidentially*

TREASURER: Lord Leo, you must help us, you
must act.

LEO: Think for yourself, man. Can I find a plan
For every new growth of this lunacy?
You hold your office still, and I have found you
Not quite unskilled in doing nothing when

The Chancellor has bidden you perform.
Keep to your ground. For God's sake, give me
time.

JACOB: Go, dearest friend, and do your best
for me:

Our woes together promise me no less.

*The BEGGAR bows low and slinks out with a furtive
look round at the company*

He brought me news that will be news for you,
You, Leo, and you too, my dearest brother,
You, Aaron, crouching in the shadow there,
The younger darling of our father's house!
How strangely we are met again! You see,
I have not left you waiting at my door
And sent a servant out to speak to you.
I bid you in and speak to you myself.
Come nearer, I will scrutinise your mouth,
Which in its movements well I know, and read
If what I tell you now is news to you,
Or if you have conspired against me. Leo,
Come closer too, my sight is sometimes dim.

LEO: Speak, sir, and tell us what we do not know.

JACOB: David and Helena are fled together
And gone towards the Northern Gate.

LEO:

JACOB: I see you did not know, but if I will
I may presume you did and made the plot,
And you too, Aaron. David is your son
And on this marriage you have set your hopes.
He is your son, and he is fled away,
Taking the girl from Leo's house, who knows
With what connivance? But I'll have them back,

Both David and the girl . . . the girl . . . and
David. . . .

She is my bride, you promised her to me,
And he's a soldier who deserts his duty,
Which he shall answer for, when I have caught him.
And I shall catch him! Do not face me now
With those dumb looks of confidence and pride.
Your boy is dead, Aaron! Leo, your girl
Shall pillow on her breast this matted head,
When I have broken her. But soon! but soon!
How slow seems all pursuit of that swift brightness,
And I am old, my crowding impulses
Outstrip the pace of these waste limbs. O soon!
My time is not for long.

TREASURER (*hushed*): His demon drags him
Into a fiendish ecstasy.

*The BEGGAR appears again in the doorway, more
furtive than before*

JACOB: Again!
What have you come to tell me?

*He goes to the door and he and the BEGGAR
whisper together*

AARON: Leo, listen.
All's come to the last hour and if I die
It would not rob me of much. You wear a dagger.
Give it to me and I will kill him.

LEO (*watching intently*): Here. . . .

*He puts the dagger into AARON's hand. ANDREW,
who has moved unseen close to JACOB and the
BEGGAR, now makes a sign to LEO and slips past
them out of the door*

AARON (*beginning to cross towards JACOB*): I'll kill him while there's time.

JACOB (*throwing up his arms and yelling*): Bunglers! All bunglers!

The BEGGAR rushes out, and JACOB after him

AARON: Age cheated me, I was not quick enough.
O, to have been in thought a murderer,
And then too slow to deal the stroke! I am fit
Only for death, I cannot what I would,
Not even wickedness.

LEO: Silence, Aaron, silence!
A moment's calm may give the game to us.
Do you not see already how these people
Murmur among themselves and turn their eyes
In question on us, like a flock of clouds
Halting and jostled by a change of wind?
That's a good weather-sign!

*ANDREW returns and crosses the room to LEO,
to whom he bows*

ANDREW: The King, my lord,
Is at the gate.

LEO: The King?

ANDREW: I went to him,
Seeing all else was vain, while the man Jacob
Stood here a-whispering with his beggar-friend.
I was not close enough to hear it all,
But heard enough to frighten me, and went
Upon the instant. Also I have despatched
Two soldiers after them. Jacob is gone,
But here they bring his friend.

Two SOLDIERS come in, dragging the BEGGAR with them

LEO:

Jacob is mad,
And I will take responsibility.
Tell me, you scoundrel, what's afoot, what plot
Came you to whisper of?

BEGGAR:

Our Chancellor
Appointed me his officer. His business
Is not a plot, but you it is that work
Disloyally against us. Let me go.

LEO: *You*, do you say? Who, then?

BEGGAR:

We are the beggars,
And Jacob is our leader and we rule,
Call off your dogs, or Jacob when he comes
Will beat their rumps for them, and yours.

AARON:

The beggars!

They are risen and the city's in their hands.

BEGGAR: Aye, we are risen, by a miracle,

As Christ rose from the tomb. Behold our wounds,
Behold the gashes in our hands and feet,
And wonder at us. Yes, man, we arose,
When God with merciful thumb and finger
plucked

Our Jacob from the gutter and set him up.

LEO: The man's beside himself. Order's too strong,

There is no miracle save in their hearts
Which gives them these mad visions. You're a spy
And brought your master news. Tell me, what
news?

Where is he gone?

BEGGAR:

I will not be a traitor.

ANDREW: You may speak truth against your will.

LEO:

I am

A kind man and a merciful, but now

The cruellest of you all that ever baited
A mangy kitten in the darkest alley
To pass your leisure hours could not exceed
My appetite for hurting. Tell me quickly,
Where is your master gone? What did you tell him
About my daughter's flight?

ANDREW:

My lord, the King!

The KING enters, followed by his Guards

KING: There, Leo, you have taken him prisoner,
And just in time. He had such mischief working
As might have pulled my kingdom on my head.
Let him be slain at once.

LEO:

Your Majesty,

This is not your Chancellor.

KING:

You are Chancellor.

Resume the seals, find them among his rags.
And do as you think fit.

LEO:

This is not Jacob.

KING: Not Jacob? With these rags and dirt, how
can I

Tell the one scabby rascal from the other?

BEGGAR: Is it the King? O, then we are be-
trayed!

The Heavens open and close again. They told us
The King had changed his heart and joined our
side.

ANDREW: Speak, while that tongue still lollops
in your mouth.

BEGGAR: I will, I will, but only spare my tongue,
Cut off my left hand, crop my ears, but spare me
My tongue and eyes.

LEO:

Speak, and make no conditions.

BEGGAR: The lady, Leo's daughter, is escaped,
This afternoon with David. I, on watch,
I and some others, saw them leave the house
And steal towards the Northern Gate. I hurried
Here to my master, while the others followed.
He bade me go again and bring them back,
He bade us kill the boy if need there were
But bring the girl again. And so I limped
Fast as my feet would let me—you can see
What poor things are my feet—across the city,
And by the Northern Gate I found my friends
On a cold scent. The boy and girl had slipped
them

And were outside the walls. I hastened back
To let my master know. He cursed at me
And ran to join the rest of us who waited
To have his orders, and by now they are
All on the trail.

LEO: All on the trail! My daughter
Is hunted through the forest by such hounds!
Give me your guards, my lord, and let me
follow,

We'll travel faster than these limping beasts
And save the quarry from the pack.

KING: My friend,
I, I myself, will come along with you
And save your daughter, yes, and Aaron's son.
Two such true subjects shall not be bereaved
If by my help I can prevent it.

AARON: Come!
The hunt is up.

BEGGAR: Lord, I have spoken, lord,
Give me my life in guerdon.

SIXTH SCENE

A wood outside the city. It is growing dusk and the stage becomes darker as the scene goes on. Enter DAVID and HELENA.

DAVID: Still there are no pursuers come in sight
And we can rest a little and consider
How we may cross the river.

HELENA: I must rest.
Will you forgive me, David? If I do not,
I'll limp and flag and be a burden, worse
Than I have been already.

DAVID: See, my dear,
This comfortable root. Sit down awhile,
And when you're rested speak no more of burdens.
Were you not weary, it had been unkind.

HELENA: Forgive me, love.

DAVID: All but this care of me.
It seems as though you held my love too light,
To spare it and give thanks so eagerly.

HELENA: Love . . .
I love you . . . and then this . . . no, I'll pretend
That I am showing you my love in this,
In snatching you from fame and happiness
To threatened wandering. I will be proud,
And think you are hardly worth my sacrifice.
Would you not so prefer me?

DAVID:

O Helena,

O, not this bitterness! I am to blame,
 But I have weighed and I will take the weight
 Of my decision. Better for us both
 To leave the city and to take our risk
 Outside the walls that once were all we honoured
 Than stay in such a hell as they have made.
 My sword! my sword! I feel as though my sword
 That made me walk so proud when it was new,
 Had crumpled at a stroke and shown itself
 Base metal, cheap and trumpery. We two
 Are better here, hungry and thirsty, better
 Than if we had stayed behind the walls and
 been

Without the courage of our appetites
 For honourable things.

HELENA:

I love you.

DAVID:

Dear,

Our love is what we seek, our love is honour,
 Goodness and peace, and we have turned our backs
 On all that is not love. Hard, hard to do!
 Gladly I spend the penny of my life
 But this large gold I take from you I know not
 How I may well invest.

HELENA:

I give it you

That you may use it as your own.

DAVID:

I must. . . .

He starts to his feet and puts his hand on his sword

HELENA: What do you hear?

DAVID: A footstep in the wood.

A PEASANT enters. DAVID lets his hand fall again

PEASANT (*starting*): Who are you there?

DAVID: Two travellers benighted,
Seeking the way towards the river. Friend,
Can you assist me to it?

PEASANT: That is far:
It grows already late. Good-night, my friend.

DAVID: A moment still. We do not know the
way,
Can you not help us?

PEASANT: Tell me who you are.

DAVID: Two travellers.

PEASANT: And whither travelling?

DAVID: Towards the river.

PEASANT: So you said before,
And after that?

DAVID: I did not ask of you
To guide me after that.

HELENA (*softly*): O, let him go.

DAVID (*softly*): I am not sure of him. How far
is it?

PEASANT: Two miles by the right road. Good-
night, my lord.

DAVID (*threateningly*): I have not finished. I will
pay you well
If you will guide us to the nearest ferry,
And more if you can find us food and drink
Upon the way.

PEASANT: Two travellers in the wood,
Lost without food or drink so near the city!
You'd best turn back and start again at dawn.
Good-night, my lord, my supper will be cold.

HELENA: O, let him go, my dear, he will not
help us.

DAVID: But he may meet—— No, fellow, do not move!

He puts his hand again on his sword. The PEASANT sullenly grasps the stake he is carrying, but looks frightened

HELENA (*rising suddenly*): David — David — David!

DAVID: Let go my hand!

HELENA: This is too like the beggar—like my father!

Kill this poor wretch, so we escape! O David, Have I reduced your sword to this? My friend, We do not mean to hurt you, we are frightened, For we are fugitives. We have done no harm, But we are flying from our enemies. You will not give us up to them. Go home And pardon us if we have frightened you. Good-night, and God go with you.

PEASANT: Good-night, lady.

He runs out

DAVID: Now you can let me go. I could not catch him,

Were I disposed to disobey you.

HELENA: David,

Look not so coldly and so harshly on me, I did not know such eyes were in your head. Have I done wrong?

DAVID: O love, you are my heart, And save you speak to me, I am a tiger, Heartless and cruel, swift to brutal anger. Before you had my heart I was not so.

And now my heartlessness has ruined you
 In urging you to this rash flight. If daylight
 Discovers us on this side of the river
 Our hopes are small.

HELENA: Belovèd, did you once,
 In your campaigning, cry: Should I advance
 The foeman's sword will strike me, I shall die,
 Therefore my prudence were to hang in rear
 And 'scape the danger? You are foolish, David,
 To think that I, a girl, am otherwise
 Disposed than you in wars of my own life.
 Your life, dear soldier, hangs upon your courage,
 Which lost from you, the rest is nothing worth,
 And women's on the wholeness of their love.
 Once breach that shell, the true self drains away
 And what remains would not be Helena,
 Would not be Helena nor David's love,
 And better far than that for me to die.

DAVID: My heart will bear no more. Despair
 makes iron
 The softest spirit. We will here repose
 Until the morning. We have left the track
 And maybe they will not discover us.
 Fold here, my darling, in the covering darkness
 And I will wrap you with my cloak.

HELENA: Good-night.
 Sleep you, like me, in peace. I am at peace,
 Because our love is safe.

DAVID: Good-night, dear love.

*He lies down beside her. After a moment or two,
 the three BEGGARS come in, driving the PEASANT
 before them*

FIRST BEGGAR: Is this the place?

PEASANT: I was so much afraid
I did not notice well. The paths go here
So twisty and them all so much alike——

SECOND BEGGAR: Where were they going?

PEASANT: They asked me for the ferry.

THIRD BEGGAR: How far is that?

PEASANT: Only a mile.

FIRST BEGGAR: Come quickly,
They may have found it, Jacob's at our heels,
We dare not fail him.

SECOND BEGGAR: He is mad to-night.
Come on, you fellow.

They hurry out, dragging the PEASANT with them

HELENA (*waking*): There was some one here.

DAVID (*sleepily*): Nothing. The night is empty,
sleep again,
We shall find happiness in sleep to-night,
Sleep, sleep again, beloved.

HELENA: O, my dear,
Now when your eyes are closed I see again
The little boy I played with long ago,
Who loved me then and loves me still, whom I
Loved then as now. Sleep, sleep again, my dear.

There is a short pause, at the end of which

JACOB *enters*

JACOB (*muttering*): I had forgotten what the
country's like,
The darkness, and the dews, and these damned
roots
God sets before me for a snare. Where are they,

The quarry or the hunt, no matter which?
 The pretty hares are gone and my fell hounds
 Lost after them in this abyss of night.
 Those I first find shall pay for it, I'll show them
 That I am Jacob, Chancellor and beggar,
 Filled with the rage of palaces and gutters.
 Come out and show yourselves, you beasts!

HELENA (*sighing*): My love,
 I heard a sound.

DAVID (*springing up*): What? Where? The night
 is still.

HELENA: Sleep, sleep again, I dreamt.

JACOB: None of us dream,
 Sweet Helena, for now the waking comes!

DAVID: Who are you? Speak, I cannot see you.
 JACOB: Soft,

David, for I am Jacob, am your uncle,
 Your father's brother, boy, so reverently
 Listen to what I tell you. While the moon,
 That now with faint light tips these boughs, is
 rising,

And ere it strikes the topmost, I shall kill you.
 I hate you. I can see you on the ground
 And blood agush from half a dozen wounds,
 Not one enough to kill, but through them all
 Your pampered veins will stream your death. And
 then,

While there you sicken in your agony,
 Back to the city will I drag my girl
 Of whom you sought to rob me.

DAVID: Uncle Jacob,
 Stand out where we can see each other.

HELENA: No!

What shall I do?

DAVID: Quiet.

JACOB: Quiet, my girl,
You have no voice in this.

HELENA: I have a voice.
I am the prize for which you two contend,
Much as it shames me.

DAVID: You are love and honour.

JACOB: You are my revenge.

DAVID: That you shall never take!

He draws his sword and strikes at JACOB, who parries. HELENA creeps round behind and is about to fling herself on JACOB's back

Helena!

HELENA: Would you not have him killed?

DAVID: To kill a man in such a way!

JACOB: I am warned.

My thanks, good, honest boy.

He coolly retreats a little way and sets his back against a tree

HELENA: You might have killed him.

DAVID: Fool! there's no honour used in killing rats.

He dashes in furiously, but JACOB defends himself

JACOB: Hallo there, friends, if you are friends of mine,

Come this way quickly, for I need you. Come!

The three BEGGARS, still dragging the PEASANT with them, run in. DAVID falls back, placing himself between HELENA and JACOB, so that she has her back to a tree-trunk

Phew, but you nearly had me there, my nephew.
I know the sword, but I am old and stiff,
And sweat and pant if I but lift my arm.
It makes me dizzy, but the running blood
About my veins and this warm sweat that drops
Give me a happiness I had forgotten.
Come, we are kin and should be friends.

DAVID: Beware,
Do not come nearer.

JACOB: Well, my friends, you are here,
Much after me, though you were off before.

FIRST BEGGAR: We have been here before. We
met this man,
Who, questioned, told us he had seen our pair
And said that he would lead us after them.
He took us past this place towards the ferry,
Whither, he swore, they went.

SECOND BEGGAR: We cannot doubt
That he was bribed by them to lead us past.

JACOB: Indeed, my man?

PEASANT: My lord, it is not true!
These here, the boy and girl, besought me first
To guide them to the ferry. I refused,
Knowing them fugitives and criminals,
And when I met these gentlemen——

THE BEGGARS: Ha! ha!

JACOB: You are advanced. Proceed.

PEASANT: I brought them back
As best I could, but it's so dark, the paths
So many and so much alike, we missed them.

FIRST BEGGAR: A pitiful, poor story!

JACOB: Put him aside:
I'll see to him when I have done with these.

You guard him, you. Three of us should suffice
 To tame my nephew. David, the last word!
 I offer to you all that's in my power,
 Except the girl, whom I must have myself.
 I would not kill you, you are young and brave
 And handsome. Stand aside and let me take her,
 And you shall live and be my son.

DAVID: I cannot,
 And why I cannot, if you understood,
 We were not enemies. I think you will
 Soon bear me down and maybe have your prize,
 But suddenly I feel I do not hate you,
 Poor blasted thing, whose fate it is to clutch
 At faith and beauty and destroy them always
 With dirty fingers. And what has made you so
 I cannot tell, but not your fault, I think,
 Nor is it mine that we must be at war
 Till one or both are dead. But you are right,
 We are alike, each one on his own side,
 And neither on the safe and middle path.

JACOB: I have strange, broken memories. . . .

There is a long pause

Begin!

We are wasting darkness.

JACOB *and two of the BEGGARS attack DAVID, who shelters HELENA behind him in a hollow of the tree-trunk. The THIRD BEGGAR stands aside, guarding the PEASANT*

FIRST BEGGAR (*falling back and panting*): Could we
 but get behind him!

PEASANT (*softly, to THIRD BEGGAR*): If I could push
 my stake between his legs

Phew, but you nearly had me there, my nephew.
I know the sword, but I am old and stiff,
And sweat and pant if I but lift my arm.
It makes me dizzy, but the running blood
About my veins and this warm sweat that drops
Give me a happiness I had forgotten.
Come, we are kin and should be friends.

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Do not come nearer.

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Much after me, though you were off before.

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Poor blasted thing, whose fate it is to clutch
At faith and beauty and destroy them always
With dirty fingers. And what has made you so
I cannot tell, but not your fault, I think,
Nor is it mine that we must be at war
Till one or both are dead. But you are right,
We are alike, each one on his own side,
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FIRST BEGGAR (*falling back and panting*): Could we
but get behind him!

PEASANT (*softly, to THIRD BEGGAR*): If I could push
my stake between his legs

I'd have him down in half a minute.

THIRD BEGGAR: Good!

When they begin again, go in and try.

PEASANT: But if I do, then will you let me go?

THIRD BEGGAR: Our master will be grateful, I can promise.

JACOB: Wait till I get my breath again.

FIRST BEGGAR: The moon

Is rising and the night is wearing on.

JACOB (*hesitatingly*): A moment still. . . .

David, I'll offer you
Even the girl if you will be my son.

You are too fine a thing for me to kill you.

DAVID (*also hesitating*): Jacob, I wonder—could
I trust your word . . . ?

HELENA: What, David, is my body worth your
soul?

I will not lie with you if thus you win me,

Or, if I must, you shall embrace a husk

That's no more Helena than I should be

Were fate to throw me in the Beggar's bed.

JACOB: God, I must have the girl, he shall not
have her.

Come at him, friends!

DAVID: Come, I am waiting here.

*The fight begins again. The PEASANT rushes up
and trips DAVID with his stake. As DAVID falls,
JACOB'S sword passes over him and strikes
HELENA. The BEGGARS cut down DAVID as he
endeavours to rise*

DAVID (*gasping*): Helena, have they hurt you? I
am done——

HELENA: Save yourself, love! I am for ever safe.
(*She dies.*)

DAVID: You sound so distant. Have you gone
away? (*He dies.*)

JACOB: What have we done? Are they both
dead? You did it,

You, fellow with the stake, prevailed where I
With all my wrongs and all my mighty longings
Could not beat down his sword. You had no
wrongs,

Nothing but fears and baseness, and your deed
Smears me with your own mud.

*He raises his sword, and the BEGGARS and the PEASANT
slip away in terror into the darkness*

Both dead, both dead!

What have I done? What have I killed? O, once,
How long ago, who knows, in my own breast
I slew the fair fore-semblance of this brightness,
Unmeaning then as now. A curse was mounted
Upon my shoulders when I first was man
That rides me still. Is this a dream, perhaps?
An image of the life I might have had,
If double-edgèd chance in mine own hand
Had not destroyed it? I am old, old, old,
Too far upon my way to travel back.
Was there a David or a Helena
Or have I dreamt them? Thus my dreams have

gone

So many years, a youth of fire and courage
And this bold, lovely mate for him—my dreams
That in my life I always killed. Ah, God,
All my life long I have been Your endless beggar,

Crying for alms, crying for You to give
 The single coin I needed, though I knew not
 What it might be. And still along the streets
 My lamentation rose of: Give, give, give!
 But You have never given. It is too late,
 Your mendicant must die in this cold night.
 Give, give, ah God, why must I sue in vain,
 Give me a penny, give a poor old man
 A penny, for the love of God a penny. . . .

*He has sunk beside the bodies of DAVID and
 HELENA into the posture of a beggar. His voice
 has taken on again the beggar's whine. As he
 utters the last lines, the moon shines out bril-
 liantly and the KING, LEO and AARON enter,
 with soldiers following*

AARON: I know we come too late.

LEO:

Jacob, stand up.

Where are they?

AARON: There!

LEO: My daughter and your son,

Both slain. We come too late.

JACOB: Give me a penny,

Give me a penny for the love of God

And I will make your name ring in my prayers. . . .

KING (*drawing his sword*): Die, evil hypocrite.

He strikes JACOB down

JACOB (*sprawling upon the ground*): It's not so
 much . . .

A meal at best. . . .

The KING strikes him again

JACOB: Ah, God. . . . (*He dies.*)

KING: It grieves me much
That he should die with God upon his lips,
But royal anger drove me.

There is a pause

Leo, Aaron,
Our followers will gather up these bodies
And bring them to the city reverently.
Name you what day you will for funeral
And I will show my love towards you both
And walk the foremost of the train.

LEO: My lord,
We thank you, with our duty.
(*To the SOLDIERS*) Bring them home.

The Curtain falls

SONNET

SLEEP is the benediction after love.
The body's effort done, the soul comes in—
One love, one soul, one sleep! O, do not move,
Sink, sink with me in this abyss and win
Our peace from those dear labours. The world
fades,

We have forced life to-night to our own will:
Now does no muscle ache, no nerve upbraids,
Like a gun charged and fired the flesh is still,
And we have hit the distant mark and know,
Beyond the old disquiet, love is peace,
Perpetual and inviolable, and O!
How like death's heaven is this full release,
This happy certitude, which we can keep
An æon, in love's benediction—sleep.

1925-1932

AFTER SILENCE

A boy, I joined the others in the song
And knew not whose the voice, my own or theirs.
Time, passing, changes all these things. Who cares
Whether I sang at all or for how long?
But echoes of the chorus whisper still
All year about my mind, and someone stares,
Forgotten listener! with glance that dares
Through dusty panes to warm the heart's long
chill.

And I must answer. Hoarse throat, harsher tongue
Must brave the danger of unpractised speech,
And now, if both should fail, who takes the blame?
Try with these halt words from my spirit wrung,
And tell me—shall we share it, one half each?
Who are you, listener? Are we both the same?

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An æon, in love's benediction—sleep.

TO THE VEILED HELEN

HELEN, I held you in my arms
And had from you the single kiss
That freed my heart from yours and made me
The symbol's slave, not yours.

Then, Helen, then I knew that I
Would love one day and find my peace:
You in my grasp, essential woman,
Yielded that pledge to me.

To-day, a happy conqueror
Of her and me and both our pain,
To her, for you, I gave the wreath,
To her gave Helen's flowers.

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JULY FLOWERS

THEY come in clearings where the bluebells were,
Tall, coarser-petalled weeds and florid bells.
Rank, out of rank soil, their abundance wells,
Flowers that our summer spouts and has no care.
Nor do we care for them. No lovers wear
Posies of willow-herb or meadow-sweet:
Their scent and colour by unheeding feet
Trampled go down and stand no longer there.
Yet, though their earth be rank, they still are hers,
And we who loved the year in her first youth
May wear the emblems of her blowzier prime,
Not judge among her children, better or worse,
But take them, different signs of the same truth,
Which, like our own, is governed still by time.

EMBLEMS OF SUMMER

COME, baby, and you, younger baby, come,
The nuts are in the hedge, the trees are full,
The blackberries are ripe, there may be some
Mushrooms for us in the next field to pull
Out of their fairy-rings, dusky and green,
And then we'll go into the wood and find,
Lying ungathered on their beds of clean,
Moist leaves, the beech-nuts with their prickly
rind.

Come, baby, and you, younger baby, too,
You emblems of my summer, come with me,
And I will give the summer's fruits to you,
Gathered by us from field and bush and tree.
Your spring makes now my summer, therefore
come
With me whom spring's default so long made
dumb.

THE THUNDERSTORM

WHEN the storm burst on us, I lay alone
And felt my house firm in the ravening air,
Heard in the orchard boughs the cavernous moan
Of the undertow of those strong gusts, my stare
Fixed on the wall, where ever and again
Flashed wide a window on the frenzied night,
When through the blank dark of the empty pane
Toppled the sudden breakers of fierce light.
And ever with that opening I knew
The rain through following darkness wildly
hurled,
Whips cutting up the earth's green wounds anew,
Swift lover ravishing a willing world.
Then, in a lull, I heard the branches weep
One moment, and then knew no more than sleep.

AFTER THE THUNDERSTORM

ALL night I laboured in the storm's embrace,
Waking or sleeping, and now wake to yawn
At the valley flooded with a steaming dawn
And mists like sweat upon earth's weary face.
And I am weary too: my heavy eyes
Soon close again but are too tired for sleep.
Deep in my flesh struck rain and lightning, deep,
And what they made there cannot soon arise.
The lightning in the air, the rain on earth,
Loosed their twin impulses through endless night,
Filled sky and mind with partnered dark and
 bright,
Gods of conception, furious for a birth,
From ploughed fields, corn, from garden-beds, the
 rose,
From hills and meadows, grass, from me—who
 knows?

THE GARDEN

In the bright, gusty April of our days
We search for changing weather here and there,
Now asking rainier skies and now more fair,
Seeking this soil or that wherein to raise
The seed of a new blossom all must praise—
Thus do all men, and thus I too have done,
While through what winding paths my feet have
run,
Nor ever found the heart of any maze!
Now in your garden let me, like a tree,
Put down my roots and stretch my arms apart,
A fruit-tree ripening on a southern wall,
There in your eyes the ripening sun to see,
And draw my sap for ever from your heart,
And bear what fruit I may and let it fall.

SEPTEMBER DEW

THE spider hangs her web from thorn to thorn,
Or ties it to a wet uncertain leaf,
Or in the late-cut cornfield on a sheaf
That stackwards in an hour or two is borne.
Not long her weaving shall remain untorn,
Nor long can hold its burden of bright dew
That gleams while day is new
On hedge and grass and corn.

Sun, drink this vaporous hour into your sky,
Breathe in these little worlds of light and fire,
And from your noontide-opening mouth respire
Your own light on my now cloud-soothèd eye.
When I return this way there shall not lie
These gossamers on any branch or blade:
The worlds the dew-drops made
Like this world too must die.

Like every world by us or nature made!
Dew-drop or Sirius, or dream or plan,
To image forth the thoughts of God or man,
The web is torn, the dew must dry, they fade.
Yet, it may be, this evening, when the shade
Moves from the corner between wood and field,
I shall find there revealed
One web still not unmade—

THE GARDEN

In the bright, gusty April of our days
We search for changing weather here and there,
Now asking rainier skies and now more fair,
Seeking this soil or that wherein to raise
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To image forth the thoughts of God or man,
The web is torn, the dew must dry, they fade.
Yet, it may be, this evening, when the shade
Moves from the corner between wood and field,
I shall find there revealed
One web still not unmade—

One web whose dew, long shadow-guarded, lay
To make new worlds out of this slanting light.
And now on every strand they glimmer bright,
And all their day this golden end of day.
Long as their earlier brothers they shall stay,
And like them shine, and like them show to me
 An unguessed mystery,
 And like them pass away.

THE FOREST-FOUNTAIN REVISITED

FIVE years ago, in blinding weather,
I came this way and saw the light
Fierce on the stream and on the mountain
And in my aching eyes too bright.

To-day the skies are gray and heavy,
The dusty road no more is dust,
The wind flings wildly in our faces
Half snow, half rain, with every gust.

But still the silver shaft of water
Springs to dark skies as then to blue,
And with its shining and its rustling
Pierces the sombre forest through.

And once again my heart stops beating,
Seeing it bright in the dark wood,
All the first wonder comes upon me,
Standing again where then I stood.

A moment then, and now no longer!
The day grows dark, the rain is cold.
But—once again to have seen that fountain,
Once more before the eyes grow old!

496 FOREST-FOUNTAIN REVISITED

These five years it has spouted upwards
To meet the sun, to meet the rain,
And now the fountain and its image
In my own mind are met again.

THE RAINBOW

Out of the cloud-chambers this sevenfold ray is
thrown,

This mystery of light,
A hundred times I have beheld the far-curved bow
Stretched over hill and marsh,

Have seen the further limb melting behind the
ridge

To an often trodden coomb,
Guessed how on the sheep-worn turf the strange
light must fall,
On what familiar paths.

But never till to-day I saw the rainbow's end,
Plain as a stooping shower,
That sometimes we can watch from the hill-tops
in sun
Drench the dim roofs of home.

O, on that near-seen grove what drizzle of gold
descends,
On the willow's chill tassels,
And on the willow-stems, tufted with these, and on
Young shoots springing beneath!

O could I stand there now, there where I often
stood,

Would not that showering gold
My skin and flesh saturate, mingle in my veins,
Transform this dull body?

And if one should go now into the willow-grove,

Would he not find the buds
Alight, still shining with traces of that caress,
Like a girl fresh from love?

FÊTE GALANTE: THE FOUNTAIN'S DECEPTION

Most like a shadow-show it seemed to him,
That play of voices on the veil of sleep,
For sleep had made their shapes and voices dim,
Noon being now so warm, so soft the grass.
He felt their babble and their laughter pass
Across his mind as cloud-cast shadows creep
Over a field asleep.

Phillis and Dorida, the fair, the brown!
Pools in the woods, lakes in the hills, their eyes—
Smooth waters to be rippled with surprise
—O lovely moment! when . . .

His head slipped down

And gold his eyelids filled,
The sun's gold that can gild
The vainest dream upon a summer's day.
He saw no more the fountain's jet ashake,
But still within his dream the two might play,
Yet to be chosen when desire should wake
That sun and garden-scents and water-sounds had
stilled.

Phillis and Dorida, the slim, the strong,
The running girls, the laughing, the ever-playing!
He heard their voices like a double song,

'The gush of laughter, the soft reply delaying,
 Never upon a single cadence staying.
 Soon might he stop the song
 From these mouths issuing
 (But which, O which of these?)
 For only mouths by no man kissed can sing
 (But which, when both alike so much can please?)

Smoother and deeper grows the veil of sleep,
 But not so deep
 That yet no voices in the dream sing on
 And fill with promises his drowsing mind,
 Till one small cloud obscures the sun
 And, chilled, he awakens with a start to find
 The garden empty and himself alone
 —A little powder scattered, a handkerchief,
 Left, as departing summer drops the first reddening
 leaf—

Yet somehow, somewhere, living voices calling,
 (The gush of laughter, the soft reply delaying,
 Never upon a single cadence staying)
 The fountain only with its double tone
 Of water falling, rising, rising, falling,
 That whispers to him: *Gone, gone, gone, gone, gone!*

THE ROOM

THIS you have made your dear abode.
Look round. The light on yonder wall,
Down the long room and past your eyes,
Does with a lovely lustre fall.

These walls you coloured and these floors
At your best choice you carpeted,
Brought from the garden in these flowers
That on your desk their pollen shed.

Work on. Loved things around you stand,
Servants of comfort and delight,
Flowers, pictures, books you shall not see
When this long room is filled with night.

Work on in joy. The sun goes down
And on the walls the lustre pales:
Still you shall work and still rejoice
Till in your room the last light fails.

MOUNT EVEREST

THERE lives a race of moths on Everest,
Strong-winged and sombre-coloured, dul-
patient.

When the wind blows,
They fold their wings and grapple to the boi

Only in calm they fly, only in calm,
And on those tortured heights the calm
seldom,

But when it comes
They rise and swirl about in airy flurries.

Only in windless hours they mount the air,
Then only live, then only meet and marry:

And year by year
Succeed the same strong patient generations

Thrice they have seen the giants from the p
Camp in their midst, and on against the mou

And thrice have seen
Downward with heavier steps the giants retu.

THE BEACH OF SHELLS

THERE is a beach upon a western shore
Which those who know it call the Beach of Shells
For there the secret tides conspire to pour

Yearly a harvest raised in the deep-sea swells,
The empty houses of bright water-things,
In heaps of whorls and cones and fluted bells.

These hither a certain drift of current brings,
And on a bayed shelf in the rock bestows
Year after year their softly shining rings

Of lavender and pearl, umber and rose,
Of iridescent sheen, dim-shaded dun,
Of red that smoulders and of red that glows,

To lie there glistening beneath the sun,
Beside the shouting or the singing sea,
All beautiful, and empty every one.

Who knows how long ocean's fertility
Hath borne this harvest or how many tides
Have swept it to this blank tranquillity,

MOUNT EVEREST

THERE lives a race of moths on Everest,
Strong-winged and sombre-coloured, dull and
patient.

When the wind blows,
They fold their wings and grapple to the boulders.

Only in calm they fly, only in calm,
And on those tortured heights the calm comes
seldom,

But when it comes
They rise and swirl about in airy flurries.

Only in windless hours they mount the air,
Then only live, then only meet and marry:
And year by year
Succeed the same strong patient generations.

Thrice they have seen the giants from the plains
Camp in their midst, and on against the mountain,
And thrice have seen
Downward with heavier steps the giants returning.

THE BEACH OF SHELLS

THERE is a beach upon a western shore
Which those who know it call the Beach of Shells
For there the secret tides conspire to pour

Yearly a harvest raised in the deep-sea swells,
The empty houses of bright water-things,
In heaps of whorls and cones and fluted bells.

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To lie there glistening beneath the sun,
Beside the shouting or the singing sea,
All beautiful, and empty every one.

Who knows how long ocean's fertility
Hath borne this harvest or how many tides
Have swept it to this blank tranquillity,

From where live water washes the rock's sides
On which these generations lived and grew
And where even now their enduring race abides?

For still, unseen beneath the covering blue,
Their children make new houses, ring on ring,
That hither shall be swept in season due,

And each a senseless, empty, lovely thing.
But where these nations of the sea are laid,
The passer-by who pauses, wondering

At how and when the Beach of Shells was made,
Finds but few perfect, as when on their rock
Each by its maker was inhabited.

The tide that threw them here with careless shock
Has cracked the delicate walls, and passing feet
Spread ruin every day with kick and knock,

And winter's frosts have worked, and summer's
heat,
To lay the intricate, vacant chambers bare,
Where once the creature lived and found life
sweet.

Would you know more than this, then kneel down
there
And dig a little with exploring hand,
Finding more fragments still in every layer,
Till last you find the shells all ground to sand.

THE BAT IN DAYLIGHT

THE mountains on the one hand, on the other
The sea, were filled with trembling sun, so bright
That all the country seemed a bowl of radiance
Filled to the rims wherever spilled the light.

But there was that dark tank beneath the olives
Whose oily surface threw me back no gleam
But drew the streaming sun to it and quenched it,
As dark as dreamless sleep after a dream,

And over it, scarce visible in the shadow,
A flickering shape, as though the shadow stirred,
That swung and swung around in frenzied circles,
Unlike the flight of any daylight bird.

It was a bat, drawn by some strange disaster
To leave its shelter while the sun was high,
And now above the tank it wheeled unceasing,
Soothed by a semblance of its midnight sky,

And finding there a comfort and a safety
It dared not leave, so ringed about with day,
Though the still water waited to engulf it
When it had flown its puny strength away.

O strange occurrence and familiar image!
I wept, I did not wonder, at the sight
Of this bewildered and unhappy brother
Drawn by the darkness, anguished by the light.

THE RETURN TO CAMPDEN

To F. L. G., for his new house

LATE, through a deepening evening, I returned,
Uneasy lest all should not be the same,
This building from its ancient fitness turned
Or that new built for obstinate love to blame.

Soft through the rain and darkness still there shone
Windows of earlier nights, and in my nose
The smoky ghosts of wood-fires, long since gone,
Charged with a sharp remembrance, pricked and
rose.

.
O, stones from the hillside dug so long ago,
Did those who dug and brought you hither know
What faith and hope in your close grain would
grow?

Wool was your wealth, but sweet air from the wold
Blew constant to invigorate your gold,
The air that still is young while you are old.

Constant as that sweet breath to-day you stand,
Last living witness in a changing land,
Stone, and that golden, where all else is sand.

O strange occurrence and familiar image!
I wept, I did not wonder, at the sight
Of this bewildered and unhappy brother
Drawn by the darkness, anguished by the light.

SONG

SWEET love, when I come to bed
And the pillow greets my head,
The last word that you say
Sends my last trouble away.
"Love," you say, "dearest love,"
And that word is enough.
Then you turn but do not wake,
Your body in my arms I take,
Then you murmur, "Love, dear love,"
And that murmur is enough.

Though smoke and profit eat our English earth,
Though dole and talking hide the ensuing dearth,
Here is the cradle of the certain birth.

Where beauty once has lived, her seed survives
And to the surface through the rubble strives,
O stones of Campden, in your stubborn lives.

.

Which stones can yet renew themselves. I see,
New from foundation to the high roof-tree,
A house that only love of them has made
Yet built as their old handlers would have bade,
A house in worship planned, wherein is shown,
Written as plain as man can write in stone,
The faith that what has been was not in vain
And hope that what once was will come again.

WINDY DAY ON MAIDEN CASTLE 511

Till the last atom shivers into light
And the brief turmoil of our universe
Ceases, and there's no longer dark or bright,
Happiness or unhappiness, better or worse.

Still drives the wind and still the shadows run
Across the bending grasses. Here, they say,
Came in old times the Children of the Sun.
And here a moment lights the sun to-day,
A golden bird among the curling snakes,
Faint, gone before the eye can see it well,
A solitary gleam of gold that makes
The darkness round it less endurable.
The wise and kindly Children of the Sun,
The old invaders who came armed with love,
The innocent-hearted Children of the Sun,
Do still their ghosts with these sad others move,
Mourning a world grown crueller than theirs?
Or are the golden gleam and that old tale
Only man's dreaming of the future years,
Which he must dream that courage may not fail?

The sky is heaped with cloud from rim to rim
Which the wind herds before it, and the light
That all day long has struggled now grows dim
On ditch and rampart. It will soon be night.

WINDY DAY ON MAIDEN CASTLE

THESE clouds that throw their shadows on the
grass,

A flowing shade that writhes and disappears,
These snakes of darkness that uncurl and pass,
Image the passing of uncounted years.
The long sound in the wind, the thin, shrill cry
That travels with the wind across the ear,
Repeats in airy, wordless mimicry
Age-old complaints of dead men walking here.

Run, clouds! cry, wind! Perform your ancient play,
You bat-voiced, shadowy players, on the steep
Of Maiden Castle. Day on day on day
Has dawned and lived and sunk into the sleep
Of all the past, and now as dream arises
To haunt the nights and days of living men,
Whose own defeats and dreams and enterprises,
Like those, in future minds will come again.
How long past and how long to come, who knows?
The capering shadows mime eternity,
Saying: In a world of sorrow man arose
And shall have sorrow everlastingly.
Still with the galaxy our mournful earth
Must bear along her always heavier load
Of hate and disappointment, war and dearth,
Until the heat-death wipes away the road,

REALITY

NIGHTLONG it blew against my windows
And shook the glass against the wincing frames:
Nightlong, I know, the sea beyond the cliff-tops
Beat on the chalk and churned in creamy coils.
In all the noise I slept and dreamt, my breathing
Mingling with hers, whose body close to mine
Created for me this small round of substance,
This little real world within a dream.